

Great Books of Islamic Civilization

The Center for Muslim Contribution to Civilization

THE
*Unique
Necklace*

VOLUME II

Al-‘Iqḍ al Farīḍ

Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih

Translated by Professor Issa J. Boullata

Reviewed by Professor Terri DeYoung

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FOREWORD

THE interrelationship and interaction of human cultures and civilizations has made the contributions of each the common heritage of men in all ages and all places. Early Muslim scholars were able to communicate with their Western counterparts through contacts made during the Crusades; at Muslim universities and centres of learning in Muslim Spain (al-Andalus, or Andalusia) and Sicily to which many European students went for education; and at the universities and centres of learning in Europe itself (such as Salerno, Padua, Montpellier, Paris, and Oxford), where Islamic works were taught in Latin translations. Among the Muslim scholars well-known in the centres of learning throughout the world were al-Rāzī (Rhazes), Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), Ibn Rushd (Averroës), al-Khwārizmī and Ibn Khaldūn. Muslim scholars such as these and others produced original works in many fields. Many of them possessed encyclopaedic knowledge and distinguished themselves in many disparate fields of knowledge.

The Center for Muslim Contribution to Civilization was established in order to acquaint non-Muslims with the contributions Islam has made to human civilization as a whole. The Great Books of Islamic Civilization Project attempts to cover the first 800 years of Islam, or what may be called Islam's Classical Period. This project aims at making available in English and other European languages a wide selection of works representative of Islamic civilization in all its diversity. It is made up of translations of original Arabic works that were produced in the formative centuries of Islam, and is meant to serve the needs of a potentially large readership. Not only the specialist and scholar, but the non-specialist with an interest in Islam and its cultural heritage will be able to benefit from the series. Together, the works should serve as a rich source for the study of the early periods of Islamic thought.

In selecting the books for the series, the Center took into account all major areas of Islamic intellectual pursuit that could be represented. Thus the series includes works not only on better-known subjects such as law, theology, jurisprudence, history and politics, but also on subjects such as literature, medicine, astronomy, optics and geography. The specific criteria used to select individual books were these: that a book should give a faithful and comprehensive account of its field; and that it should be an authoritative source. The reader thus has at his disposal virtually a whole library of informative and enlightening works.

Each book in the series has been translated by a qualified scholar and reviewed by another expert. While the style of one translation will naturally differ from another as do the styles of the authors, the translators have endeavoured, to

the extent it was possible, to make the works accessible to the common reader. As a rule, the use of footnotes has been kept to a minimum, though a more extensive use of them was necessitated in some cases.

This series is presented in the hope that it will contribute to a greater understanding in the West of the cultural and intellectual heritage of Islam and will therefore provide an important means towards greater understanding of today's world.

May God Help Us!

Muhammad bin Hamad Al-Thani
Chairman of the Board of Trustees

ABOUT THIS SERIES

THIS series of Arabic works, made available in English translation, represents an outstanding selection of important Islamic studies in a variety of fields of knowledge. The works selected for inclusion in this series meet specific criteria. They are recognized by Muslim scholars as being early and important in their fields, as works whose importance is broadly recognized by international scholars, and as having had a genuinely significant impact on the development of human culture.

Readers will therefore see that this series includes a variety of works in the purely Islamic sciences, such as Qurʾān, *ḥadīth*, theology, prophetic traditions (*sunna*), and jurisprudence (*fiqh*). Also represented will be books by Muslim scientists on medicine, astronomy, geography, physics, chemistry, horticulture, and other fields.

The work of translating these texts has been entrusted to a group of professors in the Islamic and Western worlds who are recognized authorities in their fields. It has been deemed appropriate, in order to ensure accuracy and fluency, that two persons, one with Arabic as his mother tongue and another with English as his mother tongue, should participate together in the translation and revision of each text.

This series is distinguished from other similar intercultural projects by its distinctive objectives and methodology. These works will fill a genuine gap in the library of human thought. They will prove extremely useful to all those with an interest in Islamic culture, its interaction with Western thought, and its impact on culture throughout the world. They will, it is hoped, fulfil an important rôle in enhancing world understanding at a time when there is such evident and urgent need for the development of peaceful coexistence.

This series is published by the Center for Muslim Contribution to Civilization, which serves as a research centre under the patronage of H.H. Sheikh Muhammad bin Hamad al-Thani, the former Minister of Education of Qatar, who also chairs the Board of Trustees. The Board is comprised of a group of prominent scholars. These include His Eminence Sheikh Al-Azhar, Arab Republic of Egypt, and Dr Yousef al-Qaradhawi, Director of the Sira and Sunna Research Center. At its inception the Center was directed by the late Dr Muhammad Ibrahim Kazim, former Rector of Qatar University, who established its initial objectives.

The Center was until recently directed by Dr Kamal Naji, the Foreign Cultural Relations Advisor of the Ministry of Education of Qatar. He was assisted by a Board comprising a number of academicians of Qatar University, in addition to a consultative committee chaired by Dr Ezzeddin Ibrahim, former Rector of the University of the United Arab Emirates. A further committee

acting on behalf of the Center have been the prominent university professors who act under the chairmanship of Dr Raji Rammuny, Professor of Arabic at the University of Michigan. This committee is charged with making known, in Europe and in America, the books selected for translation, and in selecting and enlisting properly qualified university professors, orientalists and students of Islamic studies to undertake the work of translation and revision, as well as overseeing the publication process.

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THE BOOK OF THE CORAL ON ADDRESSING KINGS*

Introduction to the Book of the Coral on addressing kings

Abū ʿUmar Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Rabbih said:

We have spoken about delegations and their presence before God’s Prophet, may God bless him and his family and give him peace, and we have also spoken about their presence before caliphs and kings. With God’s help, support, and guidance, we will now speak about addressing kings, currying favor with them through the magic of eloquent speech that affects the soul with its subtlety and agrees with it in finesse. Fine speech captivates hearts, for it can sometimes win over someone burning with rage and abounding with spite, and succeeds in extinguishing his rage and emptying out his spite; and it can sometimes sway the heart of the miserly and attract the full attention of the generous. God Most High has even made it a useful means and an acceptable intercessor between Him and His creatures, for He said, may He be blessed and exalted, “Then Adam received certain words from his Lord, and He forgave him, for He is surely Forgiving and Merciful.” [Q. 2:37]

We will mention in this book, if God Most High wills, those who escaped from the noose of ruin and the snare of death by their good wits, genial pleas, smooth answers, and pleasant excuses so that their evil deeds turned into good ones and they were rewarded instead of being punished. Learning these matters is more incumbent on a human being than protecting his honor and more necessary than preserving his body.

Eloquence

The essence of eloquence

Eloquence consists of everything that unveils a hidden meaning, making it fully understood and accepted by the mind. It is what God Most High has mentioned in His Book and what He has graciously bestowed upon His servants, when He said, “The Merciful taught the Qurʾān, created man, taught him eloquence.” [Q. 50:1–4]

* Volume II of this translation of Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih’s *al-ʿIqd al-Farīd* (*The Unique Necklace*) contains two of its twenty-five “books”, namely, **The Book of the Coral** and **The Book of the Ruby**.

The Prophet, God bless him and give him peace, was asked, "In what does beauty consist?" "In the tongue," he replied, meaning eloquence.

He also said, "Eloquence is truly magic."

And the Arabs used to say, "An eloquent word is sharper than an arrow."

A *rajaz* poet said:

I was afraid that you will be a narrating
Magician one time, and a poet another time.

Sahl ibn Hārūn said, "The mind is the leader of the soul, learning the leader of the mind, and eloquence the interpreter of learning."

And it was said, "Eloquence is vision and ineloquence blindness, just as learning is vision and ignorance blindness, and just as eloquence is a result of learning and ineloquence a result of ignorance."

It was also said, "Whoever is deficient in eloquence has no beauty, even if he scrapes the sky with the crown of his head."

The author of the books on logic [Aristotle] said, "The definition of man is: a living being who speaks clearly."

And he said, "The soul is the mainstay of the body, learning the mainstay of the soul, and eloquence the mainstay of learning."

Venerating kings and honoring them

The Prophet, God bless him and give him peace, said, "When an honorable man comes to you, honor him."

The learned said, "A man of power should be approached and honored only after he gives his permission."

Ziyād ibn Abīh said, "When you are in the presence of the Commander of the Faithful, you should not greet a newcomer."

Yaḥyā ibn Khālīd ibn Barmak said, "Asking kings about their personal conditions is a quality of the stupid and ignorant. If you want to ask, 'How is the Commander this morning?', then say, 'May God bless the Commander this morning with grace and honor.' When he is sick and you want to ask him about his health, then say, 'May God bestow healing and mercy on the Commander.' Kings should not be asked questions, nor should they be told *God bless you* if they sneeze, nor should they be required to answer how and wherefore." He then recited the following verses:

Kings should not be addressed on one's own initiative.
When they are bored, they should not be blamed.
In conversation, they should not be disputed with.
When they sneeze, they should not be told *God bless you*.
When addressed, they should not be asked how and wherefore.
They ought rather to be praised and venerated.
Understand my advice and don't be a fool.

Ibn Šubayḥ and al-Faḍl ibn Yaḥyā in sickness

Al-Faḍl ibn Yaḥyā fell sick. When Ismāʿīl ibn Šubayḥ, the secretary, used to visit him, he did nothing more than greet him and invoke God's blessing on him. He stayed for a short time with him but after leaving he met with the chamberlain and asked him about al-Faḍl's health, his food and drink, and his sleep. Others used to sit long with him. When al-Faḍl recovered from his sickness, he said, "No one visited me in my sickness but Ismāʿīl ibn Šubayḥ."

Between Muʿāwiya and his friends

Muʿāwiya's friends said to him once, "We may perhaps sit with you for longer than you desire. We would like you to give us a sign so that we might know that." "The sign," he replied, "is when I tell you, 'If you wish.'"

The same was asked of Yazīd and he said, "When I say, 'With God's blessing.'"

When the same was asked of ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān, he said, "When I put down the cane from my hand."

On serving kings

Some of a servant's perfect services to a king are the following: that he should bring the king's sandals to him and not let him walk to them; that he should place the right sandal opposite the king's right foot, and the left one opposite his left foot; that if he sees a couch in need of being rearranged, he should rearrange it before being ordered to do so and should not wait for such an order; that he should inspect the inkwell before being commanded to do that and should dust it before bringing it to the king; and that if he sees paper that is far from the king, he should place it in front of him by bringing it close to him, leaving it folded.

Al-Ḥajjāj and al-Shaʿbī

Al-Shaʿbī dropped in on al-Ḥajjāj and the latter asked him a grammatically wrong question, "How much is your stipend?" "Two thousands," al-Shaʿbī replied ungrammatically. "Woe to you," al-Ḥajjāj said, then correctly asked, "What is your stipend?" "Two thousand," al-Shaʿbī correctly replied. "Why then have you first made a grammatical mistake," al-Ḥajjāj asked, "when one like you does not err in grammar?" "The prince erred in grammar," al-Shaʿbī replied, "so I did too; then the prince spoke in grammatically correct Arabic, so I did too. I am not a person who would speak grammatically when the prince spoke ungrammatically; for then I would be like someone who would be scolding him about his wrong grammar, and like someone who would be displaying an arrogant behavior by presuming to speak correctly before he did." Al-Ḥajjāj liked that and gave him some money.

Kissing the hand

‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Laylā said on the authority of ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Umar, “We used to kiss the Prophet’s hand, God bless him and give him peace.”

Wakī‘ ibn Sufyān said in one of his sayings, “Abū ‘Ubayda kissed ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb’s hand.”

And al-Sha‘bī said, “The Prophet, God’s blessing and peace be upon him, came across Ja‘far ibn Abī Ṭālib, so he embraced him and kissed him between his eyes.”

Iyās ibn Dagħfil said, “I saw Abū Naḍra kiss al-Ḥusayn’s cheek.”

Al-Shaybānī said on the authority of Abū al-Ḥasan who had heard it from Muṣ‘ab, “I saw a man who, on seeing ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn in the mosque, kissed his hand and raised it to his own eyes; and ‘Alī did not prevent him.”

Al-‘Utbi said, “A man coming to see ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān kissed his hand and said, ‘Commander of the Faithful, your hand is the most worthy of being kissed because of its sublime noble deeds and because it is unblemished by sins. You rarely blame others and you forgive misdeeds. Whoever wishes to harm you, may God make him a harvest for your sword and a fugitive fleeing in fear of you.’”

Between al-Manṣūr and Abū Bakr al-Hajarī

Al-Aṣma‘ī said, “Abū Bakr al-Hajarī entered al-Manṣūr’s presence and said, ‘Commander of the Faithful, my teeth shake in my mouth; and you, members of the Prophet’s Family, are a blessing. I wish you would allow me to kiss your head, perhaps God would then preserve my remaining teeth.’ ‘Choose,’ al-Manṣūr said, ‘either this or being given an award.’ ‘Commander of the Faithful,’ al-Hajarī retorted, ‘that I have no grinders in my mouth is easier than losing an award.’ Al-Manṣūr laughed and ordered that he be given an award.”

Between Sulaymān and Ja‘far ibn Yaḥyā

Disguised in common people’s clothing to conceal his exalted station, Ja‘far ibn Yaḥyā went to see Sulaymān, Director of the House of Wisdom, who had Thumāma ibn Ashras with him. The latter warned him, “This is Abū al-Faḍl coming.” Sulaymān stood up to meet Ja‘far, kissed his hand and said, “May I ransom you by my father! What made you burden me, your servant, with this great favor for which I can’t thank you enough and that leaves me unable to recompense you?”

‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās and Zayd ibn Thābit

Al-Sha‘bī said, “Zayd ibn Thābit mounted his horse and ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās took hold of his stirrup. Zayd expostulated, “Don’t do that, O cousin of God’s Messenger, may God bless him and give him peace.” “This is what we were

ordered to do with our learned men,” replied ‘Abd Allāh. “Show me your hand,” Zayd said. ‘Abd Allāh showed him his hand, so Zayd took it and kissed it, saying, “This is what God’s Messenger, God bless him and give him peace, commanded us to do with members of our Prophet’s Family.”

Kinds of kisses

It was said that an imam should be kissed on his hand, a father on his head, a brother on his cheek, a sister on her bosom, and a wife on her mouth.

Kings who disliked hand kissing

Hishām and a man who kissed his hand

Al-‘Utbi said, “A man entered to see [Caliph] Hishām ibn ‘Abd al-Malik and kissed his hand. ‘Fie!’ Hishām grumbled, ‘Arabs kiss hands only out of fear, and Persians only out of submission.’”

A man asked to be permitted to kiss [Caliph] al-Maʿmūn’s hand. “Kissing the [caliph’s] hand by a Muslim is a humiliation,” al-Maʿmūn said. “By a covenanted non-Muslim, it is a deceit. You need not be humiliated, and we need not be deceived.”

Al-Mahdī and Abū Dulāma in a similar situation

The poet Abū Dulāma asked to be permitted to kiss [Caliph] al-Mahdī’s hand. “Forget it!” al-Mahdī objected. “You have not deprived my dependants of anything easier for them to lose than this,” commented Abū Dulāma.

Beautiful quips when addressing kings

[Caliph] Hārūn al-Rashīd said to Maʿn ibn Zāʿida, “How is Time treating you, Maʿn?” “You are Time, O Commander of the Faithful,” quipped Maʿn, “when you are good, Time is good; and when bad, Time is bad.”

Al-Rashīd and Ibn Salm in a similar event

This is like what Saʿīd ibn Salm said, when the Commander of the Faithful al-Rashīd asked him, “Who was the tribe of Qays in pre-Islamic times?” “They were the sons of Fazāra, O Commander of the Faithful,” replied Saʿīd. “And who are they in Islamic times?” asked al-Rashīd. “Commander of the Faithful,” quipped Saʿīd, “honorable people are those whom you have honored.” “You’re right,” al-Rashīd commented, “you and your people.”

Maʿn ibn Zāʿida entered the presence of Abū Jaʿfar [al-Manṣūr] and the caliph said to him, “You’ve grown old, Maʿn.” “In obeying you, Commander of

the Faithful,” quipped Maʿn. “And you’re a man of endurance,” said Abū Jaʿfar. “In opposing your enemies, Commander of the Faithful,” Maʿn said. “And you still have some remnant of life in you,” Abū Jaʿfar added. “It is all yours, Commander of the Faithful,” Maʿn replied. “Which of the two dynasties is more loved or hated by you?” the caliph asked, “Is it our dynasty or that of the Umayyads?” “That’s all up to you, Commander of the Faithful,” Maʿn replied. “When your benefaction is greater than theirs, I love your dynasty more, and when their benefaction was greater than yours, I loved their dynasty more.” “You’ve spoken truly,” commented Abū Jaʿfar.

Hārūn al-Rashīd asked ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Ṣāliḥ, “Is this your house?” “It belongs to the Commander of the Faithful and to me through him,” quipped ʿAbd al-Malik. “How is its water?” asked the caliph. “The best water,” ʿAbd al-Malik replied. “And how is its air?” asked the caliph. “The healthiest air,” replied ʿAbd al-Malik.

Abū Jaʿfar al-Manṣūr said to Jarīr ibn Yazīd, “I need you for some matter.” “Commander of the Faithful,” Jarīr said, “God has prepared for you in me a heart ready to obey you, a mind prompt to advise you, and a sword unsheathed against your enemies. Therefore command, if you will.”

Al-Maʿmūn said to Ṭāhir ibn al-Ḥusayn, “Describe your son ʿAbd Allāh to me.” “Commander of the Faithful,” Ṭāhir said, “if I were to praise him, I would be bringing disgrace to him; and if I were to criticize him, I would be slandering him. However, he is a flint stone in the hands of an arrow maker preparing for a day of battle in the service of the Commander of the Faithful.”

A caliph ordered a man to do something, and the man said, “I am more obedient and pliant to you than a loose outer cloak, and more humble and submissive than a shoe.”

Another man said, “I am more obedient to you than your own hand, and more humble than your sandal.”

This latter saying was said by al-Ḥasan ibn Wahb to Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Malik al-Zayyāt.

Al-Manṣūr said to Muslim ibn Qutayba, “What do you think of the killing of Abū Muslim [al-Khurāsānī]?” Quoting the Qurʾān, Ibn Qutayba said, “Had there been other gods in them [heaven and earth] beside God, they would have both surely gone to ruin.” [Q. 21:22] “Enough! Don’t exaggerate, Abū Umayya!”

Al-Maʿmūn said to Yazīd ibn Mazyad, “Many are the caliphs descending from the tribe of Rabiʿa!” “True,” commented Yazīd, “but their pulpits were tree stumps.”

Al-Manṣūr said to Ishāq ibn Muslim, “You’ve gone too far in your loyalty to the Umayyads.” “Commander of the Faithful,” Ishāq replied, “Whoever is loyal to anyone from whom nothing can be expected will be more loyal to someone from whom something can be expected.”

Al-Rashīd and Ibn Ṣāliḥ

Hārūn said to ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Ṣāliḥ, “Describe the town of Manbij to me.” He replied, “It has tender air and soft earth.” “Describe your house there to me,” Hārūn said. “It is lowlier than my relatives’ houses,” ‘Abd al-Malik replied, “and more eminent than the houses of its other residents.” “Why,” Hārūn asked, “when your status is higher than theirs?” “Because this is the innate character of the Commander of the Faithful – I follow his example, follow in his footsteps, and take after him.”

Al-Ma’mūn and a slave boy

Al-Ma’mūn entered the chancery one day and saw a beautiful slave boy with a pen on his ear. “Who are you, boy?” he asked. “I have grown up in your imperial state, led a good life in your kind favors, and have hopes to continue serving you: al-Ḥasan ibn Rajā’.” “It is by good and spontaneous wit that minds are differentiated for precedence,” al-Ma’mūn commented, and he added, “Raise the rank of this slave boy.”

Al-Mutawakkil and Ibn Jahm regarding Ishāq ibn Ismā‘īl’s head

‘Alī ibn Yahyā said, “I was with al-Mutawakkil when a messenger entered carrying the head of Ishāq ibn Ismā‘īl. ‘Alī ibn al-Jahm stood up and strutted in front of al-Mutawakkil, reciting:

You’re a welcome messenger bringing
What quenches one’s thirst for revenge:
The head of Ishāq ibn Ismā‘īl.

Al-Mutawakkil said to those present, “Go and collect these gems lest they be lost.”

‘Aqqāl ibn Shabba went to see Abū ‘Ubaydillāh, al-Mahdī’s secretary, and the latter said, “I haven’t seen you for a long time, ‘Aqqāl!” “By God,” ‘Aqqāl responded, “I always come to see you with longing and am absent from you with yearning to see you.”

‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Marwān said to Nuṣayb ibn Rabāḥ, who was a black man, “Nuṣayb, do you have anything that can enliven conversation?” He meant in drinking companionship. “May God make the Commander prosper. My color is ashen gray and my hair is curly. I don’t sit with you because of noble lineage or handsome looks, but rather because of my mind and my tongue. If you see fit not to separate them, do what you see fit.”

When al-Ma’mūn bade al-Ḥasan ibn Sahl farewell on leaving the City of Peace [Baghdad], he asked him, “Abū Muḥammad, do you have any request that you would like me to attend to?” “Yes, Commander of the Faithful,” al-Ḥasan said, “to preserve for me in your heart what I can only ask help from you, and no one else, in preserving.”

Saʿīd ibn Salm ibn Qutayba said to al-Maʿmūn, “If I were not to thank God for anything that He granted me but the attention of the Commander of the Faithful to my speech and the heed to me of his eyes, that would be the greatest thing required by benevolence and necessitated by a good deed.” “By God,” al-Maʿmūn replied, “that is because the Commander finds that you explain well when you speak, and understand well when you are spoken to – these being qualities he does not find in others.”

Praising kings and flattering them

In the history books of the Persians, there is a record that, when Ardashīr ibn Yazdajird had firmly established his authority, he gathered the people and delivered a speech to them in which he urged them to obey and be united, and warned them against disobedience and departure from the consensus of the community, thus categorizing human beings for them into four kinds, and they bowed and prostrated themselves to him. Then their spokesman said, “O king, may you always be endowed by God with the power of victory, the achievement of your hopes, continuous good health, abundant blessings, and augmentation in all these. May your noble deeds follow in succession, and your life and property be secure until you reach the utmost degree that will be safe from evanescence and will continuously blossom in the permanent abode which God has prepared for favored people like you who enjoy His good graces. May your rule and power remain so long as the sun and the moon do, increasing as the seas and rivers do, until all the countries of the earth equally acknowledge your supremacy and effective command over them. Your light has shone on us and overwhelmed us like the light of morning, and your great mercy has reached us and is like a continuous breeze blowing on our souls. Through you, God has united the people after their dispersion, brought harmony to their hearts after mutual hatred, and removed old feuds and animosities after their fires had blazed high – all because of your benevolence that cannot be grasped by any description or limited by any qualification.”

Ardashīr replied, “Blessed is the one who is praised, if he deserves praise; and blessed is the one who invokes God’s favors, if he is worthy of being hearkened to.”

Hassān ibn Thābit went to see al-Ḥārith al-Jafnī and said, “Good morning, O king. Heaven is your blanket, earth your sandals, and my parents are your ransom. How can al-Mundhir compete with you? For, by God, the back of your head is more handsome than his face; your mother is more beautiful than his father; your shadow is better than his person; your silence is more eloquent than his speech; and your left hand is better than his right hand.” Then he recited:

I have been told that Abū Mundhir
Vies with you for superiority in noble deeds.

The back of your head is prettier than his face;
 Your mother is better than al-Mundhir;
 And your left hand, even when not generous,
 Is like his right hand – have no doubt about that.

Khālīd ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Qasrī entered the presence of ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz when the latter became caliph and said, “Commander of the Faithful, there are those to whom the office of the caliphate has been an adornment; but you have indeed adorned it. And there are those to whom it has been an honor; but you have indeed honored it. The poet’s saying applies to you when he said:

If pearls adorn the beauty of faces,
 Your face’s beauty adorns the pearls.”

Al-Ma’mūn and someone who praised him on entering Baghdad

Ibn Abī Ṭāhir said, “When al-Ma’mūn entered Baghdad, the notables of its population received him. One of them said to him, “Commander of the Faithful, may God bless your coming, increase your grace, and requite you for your benefaction to your subjects. You have surpassed those who preceded you, you have exhausted those who followed you, you have rendered hopeless those who expected to see someone like you: for in the past, we knew none like you; and in the present and future, we expect none. We all pray for you and praise you. Your attitude toward us is fruitful, your drink sweet, your look beautiful, and your power noble. You have strengthened the poor and freed the captive. Commander of the Faithful, an early poet’s words apply to you as he said:

You have continued to love generous giving
 And freeing many a prisoner burdened with his crime,
 Until the innocent have wished that they were
 Your prisoners held in fetters and chains.”

Between Khālīd al-Qasrī and someone in a similar situation

A man entered to see Khālīd ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Qasrī and said to him, “Commander, you generously give what is significant, you kindly mend what is broken, and you abundantly increase what is scanty; your benevolence is wonderful and your opinion is the basis for consensus.”

A man said to al-Ḥasan ibn Sahl, “I no longer consider exorbitant the abundance you give me or find inconsiderable the little that you grant me.”

Khālīd ibn Ṣafwān said to a governor who had come to see him, “You have come: you give everyone a portion of your attention, your time in council, your gifts, and your promises so that it is as if you belong to everyone or you belong to no one.”

Al-Rashīd said to a certain poet, “Have you composed anything new about us?” “Commander of the Faithful,” the man replied, “All praise is insufficient

for your rank and all poetry is above mine; but I appreciate the verses of al-ʿAttābī:

What can a man praising you say in a eulogy about you when
Sanctity and purity are your names in the Revelation?
You are beyond praises, except that our tongues are
Required to say what our consciences conceal.”

Ibn Ṣafwān praising a man

Praising a man, Khālīd ibn Ṣafwān said, “He is of exquisite logic, eloquent words, and clear Arabic language; his gestures are few and his gesticulations are elegant; he is of pleasant qualities and abundant gracefulness; he kindly treats a camel’s mange and remedies its sores; he does not put his hand to anything for long but always hits the point; he is not of meager manliness nor of prattling talk; he is not a follower but one to be followed.

... He is like a mountain on whose top is a fire.”

Al-Rashīd and Sahl ibn Hārūn

Sahl ibn Hārūn went to see al-Rashīd and found him jesting with his son al-Maʿmūn. He said, “Increase his bounties, O God, and augment his blessings so that every day of his life will excel his yesterday and fall short of his tomorrow.” “Sahl,” al-Rashīd asked, “who is the person who related the best and most beautiful poetry, narrated the soundest and most eloquent *ḥadīth* [sayings of the Prophet], recounted the clearest and most distinct rhetorical expressions, and who – when he wanted to say anything – was never incapable of doing that?” “Commander of the Faithful,” Sahl replied, “I don’t think that anyone has ever preceded me in expressing this idea.” Rashīd said, “Aʿshā Hamdān rather did. And that is where he said:

Yesterday, I found you to be the best man among Luʾayy’s sons;
And today you are better than yourself yesterday.
Tomorrow, you will double your goodness –
This is the modality by which the leaders of ʿAbd Shams increase.”

Al-Maʿmūn and Sahl ibn Hārūn

Al-Maʿmūn had come to entertain a feeling that Sahl ibn Hārūn was unbearable. Then the latter entered al-Maʿmūn’s presence one day as people of different ranks were present. Al-Maʿmūn spoke without restraint about many subjects. When he stopped, Sahl ibn Hārūn turned to the gathering and said, “What is the matter with you? You listen and don’t comprehend, you understand and aren’t surprised, you are surprised but don’t speak out in admiration! By God, he is saying and doing in one short day what Banū Marwān said and did in a whole

age. Your Arab men are as [inarticulate] as their Persian men, and their Persian men are [as eloquent as] the Arabs of Banū Tamīm. But how can anyone who does not know the disease know the [benefit of the] medicine?" Al-Ma'mūn returned to his former [good] opinion of Sahl.

Al-Ḥajjāj and Ziyād al-ʿAtakī

Al-Ḥajjāj used to consider Ziyād ibn ʿAmr al-ʿAtakī unbearable. When the delegation to ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān praised al-Ḥajjāj, Ziyād said, "Commander of the Faithful, al-Ḥajjāj is your sword that never fails; he is your arrow that never misses; and he is your servant who is never affected by anybody's blame on account of you." Henceforth, there was nobody more likable or more charming in al-Ḥajjāj's view than Ziyād.

Ibn Shayba on Ṣāliḥ ibn al-Manṣūr

Al-Shaybānī narrated the following, "[Caliph] al-Manṣūr made his son Ṣāliḥ stand up and speak on a certain subject. When he spoke well, Shabīb ibn Shayba commented, 'By God, not until today have I ever seen anyone as eloquent, as clear, as composed, as fluent, or more methodical. It is the right of someone whose father is al-Manṣūr and whose brother is al-Mahdī to be as Zuhayr said:

He is a race horse, so if he catches up with both of them
Despite his burdens, someone like him ought to catch up.
Or if they get ahead of him despite their leisurely pace,
This resembles their former good deeds that are ever ahead.'"

Ibn Shayba on the caliphate

Shabīb ibn Shayba left the seat of the caliphate one day and was asked, "What do you think of the people you saw there?" "Those who entered," he replied, "were hopeful; and those who left were satisfied."

A caliph's words on Ibn Shayba

A caliph was once told, "Shabīb ibn Shayba works out his speeches and prepares himself for them. If you order him to ascend the pulpit to speak unexpectedly, he will be exposed [as unready]." So he ordered a messenger to take Shabīb by the hand and make him ascend the pulpit. Shabīb began by praising God and lauding Him, he invoked blessings on the Prophet, God bless him and give him peace, then he said, "The Commander of the Faithful has four analogues: the lion in the den, the turbulent sea, the radiant moon, and the blooming spring. As for the lion in the den, the caliph resembles its strength and determination; as for the turbulent sea, he resembles its generosity and liberal giving; as for the radiant moon, he resembles its light and brightness; as for the blooming spring, he resembles its beauty and resplendence." Shabīb then descended.

‘Abd al-Malik and a man with a need

“Ask what you need,” ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān said to a man who entered to see him. “Commander of the Faithful,” the man replied, “I am overwhelmed by your rank and struck by the awe of your caliphate, and thus I am prevented from asking.” “Take it easy, then,” the caliph said, “We don’t like being praised on first sight or commended at the first meeting.” “Commander of the Faithful,” the man returned, “I am not praising you but rather thanking God for the blessing of having you.” “That’s sufficient,” the caliph replied, “you’ve eloquently expressed yourself.”

Al-Manṣūr said to a man who entered to see him, “Ask what you need.” “May God keep you, Commander of the Faithful,” the man replied. “Ask what you need,” the caliph repeated, “for you do not have this opportunity every day.” “Commander of the Faithful,” the man began, “I swear by God I do not believe your life will be short, I do not fear that you are a miser, and I would not take advantage of your wealth. Being given anything by you is an honor, asking for a gift from you is an adornment, and no man who humbles himself to you is shamed or dishonored.” The caliph rewarded him well and treated him generously.

Al-Ma’mūn and al-‘Umānī

Ibrāhīm ibn al-Sindī said, “Wearing a tall cap and simple sandals, al-‘Umānī went to see al-Ma’mūn. “Be careful not to recite poetry to me,” the caliph warned, “unless you are wearing an imposing, well-wrapped turban and fine sandals.” Al-‘Umānī came the next day in bedouin clothing, recited his poetry, then approached and kissed the caliph’s hand and said, “By God, O Commander of the Faithful, I recited my poetry to Yazīd ibn al-Walīd and Ibrāhīm ibn al-Walīd, I saw their faces, kissed their hands, and received their rewards; I recited my poetry to Marwān, kissed his hand, and received his reward; I recited my poetry to al-Manṣūr, saw his face, kissed his hand, and received his reward; I recited my poetry to al-Mahdī, saw his face, kissed his hand, and received his reward; and I recited my poetry to many others of their likes, to princes, leaders, and chiefs. But, by God, O Commander of the Faithful, I have not seen among them anyone whose appearance was more splendid, whose face more handsome, whose hand more generous, whose palm more liberal than yours, Commander of the Faithful.” So al-Ma’mūn gave him a great reward for his poetry, doubling it because of his words, and turned to him with a cheerful face; and all those present wished they were in his place.

‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, Iraq’s delegation, and Muḥammad al-Quraṣī

Speaking on the authority of Sufyān ibn ‘Uyayna, al-‘Utbi said, “A group of Iraq’s people came to ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and he noticed a young man among them getting ready to speak. ‘Speak in descending order of age: the older first,’ ‘Umar said. The young man retorted, ‘Commander of the Faithful, it

should be not by age; for if it were by age that matters run, there would have been among the Muslims someone older than you [for the caliphate].’ ‘You are right,’ the caliph said, ‘may God have mercy on you. Speak.’ ‘Commander of the Faithful,’ the young man began, ‘we have not come to you out of hope or fear. Hope has already entered our homes and our country; as for fear, God has given us security from your injustice by your justice.’ ‘So who are you, people?’ asked the caliph. ‘The delegation of thanks,’ the young man said. Muḥammad ibn Kaʿb al-Qurazī saw ‘Umar’s face beam with joy and he said, ‘Commander of the Faithful, let not people’s ignorance of you overcome your knowledge of yourself. Some human beings are deceived by praise and deluded by people’s thanks, and they have perished. I pray to God that you not be one of them.’ ‘Umar dropped his head upon his chest.”

Disavowal and excuse

The Prophet, God bless him and give him peace, said, “Whoever does not accept the excuse of someone disavowing an act, be he truthful or lying, will not drink from my water basin.”

He also said, “Someone admitting a sin is like someone who has no sin.” And he also said, “Confession abolishes commission.”

A poet said:

If a man repents a deed and comes to you penitently
And you do not forgive him, the sin is then yours.

A man sought the forgiveness of Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī. “I have forgiven you,” Ibrāhīm said, “but not because of the excuse you gave; for excuses are mixed with lies.”

A man sought the forgiveness of Jaʿfar ibn Yaḥyā, and the latter said, “God has relieved you of giving excuses by your seeking of forgiveness, and He has freed us of distrust by our having a good intention.”

Ibrāhīm al-Mawṣilī said, “I heard Jaʿfar ibn Yaḥyā apologizing to a man for a thing he had guaranteed to him but was delayed, and he said, ‘My excuse to you is based on the fact of overpowering fate; and my apology to you is based on the truth of my sincere intention.’”

A man said to a king, “I do not argue with you to defend myself and I do not seek to deceive you about my crime. I only solicit your satisfaction for the sake of your pardon, I only try to earn your sympathy by admitting my offense, and I only seek to win you over by confessing my lapse.”

Al-Ḥasan ibn Wahb said:

How good it is when a powerful man pardons
A person, particularly someone who has no helpers.
If I committed an offense, which I have not,

There is no one to forgive it but yourself.
 I pray that the affection which existed between us first
 Will not be impaired by the offense which has occurred last.

Al-Ḥasan ibn Wahb wrote to Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Malik al-Zayyāt:

Abū Ja‘far, how good pardon is, especially
 Of a person who says, “I have no excuse.”

Another poet said:

Accept the excuses of someone who comes to you repentant,
 Whether he is honest in what he tells you or is a liar.
 For one who wants to please you in appearances obeys you
 And one who disobeys you in secret actually reveres you.
 The better of two friends is he who overlooks his friend’s fault
 When he has the power to turn upon him – but does not.

The wise have said, “It is not fair to blame others hastily.”
 Al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays said, “Many a blamed man is guiltless.”
 Another said:

... Perhaps he has an excuse as you blame him.

Ḥabīb said:

Your good treatment of me eased my excusing myself to you
 For what you heard, so you neither accepted it nor blamed me.
 You knew me well and your knowledge of me attested
 On my behalf, like a fair witness of unsuspected words.

Another poet said:

When an offender apologizes, his apology erases his offense;
 And everyone who does not accept an apology is an offender.

On this idea, we said:

My excuse for weeping long is the agony of my sorrow.
 There’s no excuse for someone who doesn’t accept my excuse.

Another poet said:

Suppose I were a wrong-doer, as you unfairly said,
 Forgive me kindly then, so that you may earn the merit.
 And if I were not worthy of your forgiveness
 For what I have done, you are worthy of it.

Some people do not believe in apologizing and say, “Beware of what you apologize for.”

And they say, “Whenever an offender apologizes, his offense becomes greater.”

The poet Maḥmūd al-Warrāq said:

If the reason for an apology is not clear,
It is better to withhold it.

‘Abd al-Malik and Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhri

Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhri said, “I went to see ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān with a group of people from Medina. Seeing that I was the youngest, he asked me, ‘Who are you?’ So I informed him of my relatives and ancestors. ‘Your father and uncle,’ he commented, ‘were provocateurs in the sedition of Ibn al-Ash‘ath.’ ‘Commander of the Faithful,’ I said, ‘if someone like you forgives, he does not keep score; and if he pardons, he does not blame.’ ‘Abd al-Malik liked that and asked, ‘Where have you grown up?’ ‘In Medina,’ I replied. ‘And who were your teachers?’ he asked again. I said, ‘Sa‘īd ibn al-Musayyab, Sulaymān ibn Yasār, and Qabiṣa ibn Dhu‘ayb.’ ‘Those are a far cry from ‘Urwa ibn al-Zubayr,’ he said, ‘for he is a sea unperturbed by buckets.’ When I left him, I adhered to ‘Urwa ibn al-Zubayr and did not leave him until he died.”

Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān and Ibn al-Sammāk

Ibn al-Sammāk entered to see Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān ibn ‘Alī and noticed that he turned away from him. “Why does the commander seem to me like someone who reproves me?” Ibn al-Sammāk asked. “Because I heard something about you that I did not like,” said Muḥammad. “Then, I don’t care,” commented Ibn al-Sammāk. “Why not?” asked Muḥammad. “Because, if it were an offense,” Ibn al-Sammāk answered, “you will forgive it; and if it were a false report, you will not accept it.”

Al-Manṣūr and Jarīr ibn ‘Abd Allāh

Jarīr ibn ‘Abd Allāh entered the presence of Abū Ja‘far al-Manṣūr who was angry with him. “What’s your plea?” asked the caliph. “If I committed an offense,” Jarīr answered, “I would present my apology; but the pardon of the Commander of the Faithful is sweeter to me than my innocence.”

Al-Hādī and an offender

A man was brought to Mūsā al-Hādī, so the latter began to scold him for his offenses. “Commander of the Faithful,” the man pleaded, “if I were to excuse myself for what you scold me for, I would be refuting you; and if I were to acknowledge it, I would be admitting an offense I had not committed. But I say:

If you hope to have comfort when you punish,
Don't spare the reward when you pardon."

Al-Ma'mūn and Ibn al-Fārisī

ʿAbd al-Malik ibn al-Fārisī was slandered to al-Ma'mūn and the latter said to him, "A just man is a man whom Abū al-ʿAbbās considers to be just, and he has described you well; then I heard contrary descriptions about you." "Commander of the Faithful," ʿAbd al-Malik said, "what you have heard about me is mere calumny. If it is so, I will say, 'Yes, it is as you have heard.' I will thus be truthful in God's view, and I will rely on the beneficence of the Commander of the Faithful and his extensive pardon." "You are right," al-Ma'mūn said.

Al-Ma'mūn and Ibn Yūsuf regarding a complaint against him

Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim Abū al-ʿAynāʾ said, "Aḥmad ibn Yūsuf was the secretary responsible for administering the charities of Basra. He was oppressive and unfair in his work, and there were many complaints against him and many people cursed him. About fifty men among the notables of Basra went to the Commander of the Faithful, al-Ma'mūn. The caliph deposed him, held a special council for them, and summoned Aḥmad ibn Yūsuf to it to respond to them. Of his words that were preserved are the following:

"'Commander of the Faithful, if anyone of those responsible for the charities was ever spared from [criticism by] the people, God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, would have been spared. God, may He be exalted, said, 'And among them are those who find fault with thee regarding the charities. If they are given thereof, they are pleased, but if they are not given thereof, behold, they are angry.' " [Q. 9:58]

"Whereupon, al-Ma'mūn was pleased with Aḥmad ibn Yūsuf's response, considered his words eloquent, and set him free."

Muḥammad ibn al-Qāsim al-Hāshimī Abū al-ʿAynāʾ said:

Abū ʿAbd Allāh Aḥmad ibn Abī Dāwūd said, "I entered the presence of al-Wāthiq and he said to me, 'There are some people who continue to criticize you and find fault with you!' 'Commander of the Faithful,' I replied, *'every man of them shall be charged with the sin he acquired; and the one of them who took the chief part therein shall have a great punishment* [Q. 24:11], God will punish him and the penalty of the Commander of the Faithful will follow; for no man whom you support will be humiliated, and no man whom you protect will be lost. And what did you say to them, O Commander of the Faithful?" "Abū ʿAbd Allāh,' al-Wāthiq replied, 'I said to them:

Some women censured ʿAzza to me for her faults –
May God make their cheeks her sandals.'"

Abū al-ʿAynāʾ said, "I said to Aḥmad ibn Abī Dāwūd, 'Some people have joined forces against me.' 'God's hand is over their hands,' [Q. 48:10] he said. 'They are

many and I am only one,' I commented. '*Many a small group has triumphed over a large group,*' [Q. 2:249] he quipped. 'Those people have evil plotting,' I said. '*Evil plotting encompasses only those who do it,*' [Q. 35:43] he confirmed." Abū al-ʿAynāʾ added, "I related this conversation to Aḥmad ibn Yūsuf, the secretary, and he said, 'Ibn Abī Dāwūd thinks that the Qurʾān has been revealed to him only.'"

Qutayba ibn Muslim and Nahār ibn Tawsiʿa

Nahār ibn Tawsiʿa lampooned Qutayba ibn Muslim, who had been appointed as governor of Khurāsān following Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab. He said:

When Yazīd was in Khurāsān, it was a land
In which all doors to ample resources were open.
After he left it, it turned into a monkey we rove about with,
Whose face looks as though it was wetted with vinegar.

Qutayba sought him but Nahār escaped and later returned to him with a [pleading] letter from Qutayba's mother. "Woe to you," Qutayba chided, "with what face do you meet me?" "With the face I will meet my Lord with," Nahār said, "for my sins toward Him are more numerous than my sins toward you." And so, Qutayba brought him close, gave him a gift, and treated him well.

Al-Manṣūr and Ibn Faḍāla

Al-Manṣūr came mounted on a horse one day when al-Faraj ibn Faḍāla was sitting at the Golden Gate [of Baghdad]. All the people stood up for him but Ibn Faḍāla did not. Fuming with rage, al-Manṣūr summoned him and asked, "What prevented you from standing up with the [rest of the] people when you saw me?" Ibn Faḍāla replied, "I was afraid that God Most High would ask me, 'Why did you stand up?' and that He would ask you regarding standing up, 'Why did you approve it?' For God's Messenger, God bless him and give him peace, disliked it." Al-Manṣūr's anger subsided and he brought al-Faraj closer to him and satisfied his needs.

Al-Maʾmūn and Ibn Aktham

Yaḥyā ibn Aktham said, "I was one day with al-Maʾmūn when a man was brought in who was trembling with fear. As the man stood before him, al-Maʾmūn asked him, 'You have been ungrateful to me and have not thanked me for my favors.' 'Commander of the Faithful,' the man said, 'how can my thanks compare with God's blessings to me through you?' The caliph looked at me and quoted the following verses:

If any glorious person were in no need of thanks
Because of great wealth or high status,
God would not have commanded His servants to thank Him
When He said: Thank Me, O you humans and jinn.

“Then he turned to the man and said, ‘Why don’t you say as Aṣram ibn Ḥumayd did:

I praised you so abundantly that I have become a man
Whose whole being is busy with every praiseworthy quality in you.
You empowered my thanks with the power of your blessings,
And so my free thankfulness is a slave of your powerful gifts.’”

Entreaty and acknowledgment

Al-Mahdī and Ibn Dāwūd

When al-Mahdī was angry with Yaʿqūb ibn Dāwūd, he called out to him, “Yaʿqūb!” “At your service, Commander of the Faithful,” Yaʿqūb said, “I am responding like someone distressed at your anger.” “Have I not raised your status when you were lowly?” the caliph chided, “Have I not made your name known far and wide when you were unknown? Have I not lavishly conferred upon you my favors that you did not thank me for? What do you think God will do to you and how will He retaliate?” “If that wrong came to be known by you on your own, Commander of the Faithful, then I acknowledge it and admit it with regret; and if it was what the grudges of unfair others ascribed to me, then I take refuge in your beneficence.” The caliph replied, “By God, if it were not for my dislike of breaking oaths to preserve your blood for what good you had done, I would have clothed you with a shirt of blood you did not need to button up.” He then ordered that he be imprisoned, and Yaʿqūb went away saying, “Commander of the Faithful, loyalty is a sign of generosity and affection a sign of mercy, and you deserve them both.”

Poets took the idea of the caliph’s saying “I would have clothed you with a shirt of blood you did not need to button up,” and Muʿallā al-Ṭaʿī said:

I gave him with my sword a collar of disaster
That he could not button up.

And Ḥabīb said:

I gave him with my sword a collar of death
That prevented him from touching his collar with his hand.

And he said:

I gave him a blow with my unsheathed sword
And that was the last collar he wore around his neck.

Yazīd ibn Mazyad before al-Rashīd

When al-Rashīd was no longer angry with Yazīd ibn Mazyad, he permitted him to enter his presence. Standing before the caliph, Yazīd said, “Praise be to

God who facilitated for me the honor of meeting you, and restored to me the blessing of your satisfaction. Commander of the Faithful: when you are angry, may God reward you with the reward of beneficent men who give what they desire; and when you are pleased, may He reward you with the reward of benefactors who give in abundance. God, may He be praised, has let you restrain yourself firmly when you are angry, be gracious when you give abundantly, and maintain good deeds to beneficiaries out of your kindness.”

Al-Ma'mūn and Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī

When al-Ma'mūn vanquished Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī, who was called Ibn Shikla, he ordered that he be presented to him. Standing before the caliph, Ibrāhīm said, “The person responsible for retaliation is an arbitrator of the punishment to be meted out. To pardon is closer to being pious [than not to pardon]. Power causes rancor to disappear, and the one to whom a hopeful apology is offered is strongly moved to be patient before administering a destructive punishment. God has made every crime lesser than your pardon. So if you forgive, that will be out of your magnanimity; and if you punish, that will be your right.”

Al-Ma'mūn said, “I have consulted Abū Ishāq and al-ʿAbbās about putting you to death, and they advised that I should.”

Ibrāhīm argued, “If they so advised you, knowing the great power of kingship and the current customs of politics, they have done well; but you have always declined to achieve victory in any way but the one that God has accustomed you to.” He then burst into tears.

“Why do you cry?” al-Ma'mūn asked.

“Out of happiness,” Ibrāhīm replied, “for my crime is against someone whose quality this is.” Then he added, “Commander of the Faithful, even though my crime deserves the shedding of my blood, the clemency of the Commander of the Faithful and his kindness are worthy of his pardon. In furtherance to both, I have in my favor the plea of having acknowledged my crime and your reverence for my forefathers.”

“If your ancestry by right does not alone deserve forgiving your lapse,” al-Ma'mūn replied, “your gentle approach and graceful disavowal do.”

In seeking the caliph's satisfaction and staving off evil from himself, Ibrāhīm was more graceful in considering Abū Ishāq's and al-ʿAbbās's opinion to be correct than in considering them to be wrong.

Al-Ma'mūn and Ishāq ibn al-ʿAbbās

Al-Ma'mūn said to Ishāq ibn al-ʿAbbās, “Don't think that I have forgotten the uproar you caused with Ibn al-Muhallab, your support of his opinion, and your kindling of his fire.”

“Commander of the Faithful,” Ishāq said, “I swear by God that the crime of Quraysh against God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, was greater indeed than my crime against you, and my blood relationship [to

you] is more intimate than theirs [to him]. God said as Joseph said to his brothers, *'There shall be no blame on you today; God will forgive you, for He is the Most Merciful of the merciful.'* [Q. 12:92] And you, Commander of the Faithful, are the most deserving heir of this grace and the best model of it."

"Absolutely out of the question," al-Ma'mūn objected. "Those were crimes in pre-Islamic times that Islam has wiped out. But your crime has been committed by you as a Muslim and against your caliphate."

"Commander of the Faithful," Ishāq replied, "I swear by God that, more than an unbeliever, a Muslim deserves to be steadied when he stumbles and forgiven when he lapses. Let God's Book be an arbiter between you and me. God Most High says, *'And vie with one another in seeking your Lord's forgiveness and a Paradise whose breadth is the heavens and the earth, prepared for the God-fearing who spend in prosperity and adversity, and who suppress anger and pardon others – God loves those who do good.'* [Q. 3:132–133] Commander of the Faithful, this is a traditional norm for all people, equally shared by a Muslim and an unbeliever, a nobleman and a commoner."

"You are right," the caliph conceded. "Sit down. You have strengthened me. None of your relatives in the past has sparked my fire like you."

On the authority of his father, al-ʿUtbī related the following, "Marwān ibn Muḥammad seized the property of Muʿāwiya ibn ʿAmr ibn ʿUtba in al-Firsān, saying, 'In the document in which your uncle bestowed a fief on your father, I found the sentence *I bestow my garden as a fief on you*. Now a garden cannot be a garden unless it is cultivated, so I will hand over to you the uncultivated part and take possession of the cultivated one.' 'Commander of the Faithful,' Muʿāwiya remonstrated, 'If your good ancestors were witnesses to our present meeting, they would testify to the truth of what I have claimed and would support my request; they would ask you to do me a good turn as a reward for my ancestors' good deeds to them. So let the dead be intercessors between us. Preserve the relationships we have and let your present meeting obligate those who come after us to be thankful to it.' 'No, by God,' the caliph replied, 'I will make it a gift from me to you, not a fief bestowed by your uncle to your father.' Muʿāwiya said, 'I accept that.' So the caliph did."

ʿAbd al-Malik, Ibn ʿUtba, and Khālīd ibn Yazīd

Al-ʿUtbī said:

ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān ordered that stipends and gifts to the family of Abū Sufyān be cut off because he was angry with Khālīd ibn Yazīd ibn Muʿāwiya. ʿAmr ibn ʿUtba entered the presence of ʿAbd al-Malik and said, "Commander of the Faithful, the least of our duty to you is exhausting and some of it is burdensome. Yet along with our duty to you, you have a duty to us by virtue of the honor our ancestors rendered to your ancestors. Look at us, then, with the eye they looked at them, and place us according to our blood relationship to you."

‘Abd al-Malik replied, “Only those who ask me for a gift deserve to be given one. As for anyone who thinks he can be sufficient unto himself, we shall leave him to himself.” Then he ordered that ‘Amr be given a gift.

When that story reached Khālīd, he said, “Does he threaten me with depriving me [of his gifts]? God’s generous hand is above his hand, and God’s abundant gifts are given without him. As for ‘Amr, he has given of himself more than he has taken.”

Sulaymān ibn ‘Alī and Ibn ‘Utba facing the Black-Flag Bearers

Al-‘Utbi said:

Ṭāriq ibn al-Mubārak related the following, having heard it from ‘Amr ibn ‘Utba, “The Black-Flag Bearers [the ‘Abbāsids] came to power when I was a young man with many dependents and scattered property. Whenever I stayed with any of the Arab tribes, I came to be publicly known among its members. As I realized that I could not conceal my identity, I went to Sulaymān ibn ‘Alī and asked to see him around sunset. He permitted me to see him although he did not know me. When I was with him, I said, ‘May God make you prosper. I have been tossed by many lands to you, your beneficence having guided me to you. So you either receive me as a winner or send me back safe and sound.’

“‘And who are you?’ he asked. So I traced my ancestry for him and he realized who I was. ‘Welcome,’ he said. ‘Sit down and speak as a winner who is safe and sound.’ ‘May God make you thrive,’ I began, ‘the women to whom – like us – you are the closest of people, and of whom – after our death – you will be the most likely defender are afraid because of our own fear. And whoever is afraid should be feared for.’ Sulaymān leaned on his hands, his tears flowing on his cheeks, and said, ‘O son of my brother. May God spare your blood, protect your womenfolk, and keep your wealth safe, if He wills. If I can do that for all your people, I will.’ And so, I stayed in the protection of Sulaymān and was secure.”

Sulaymān wrote to Abū al-‘Abbās, the Commander of the Faithful, “After greeting you, Commander of the Faithful, we declare that we only fought Banū Umayya because of their recalcitrance and not their blood relationship. A group of them have come to me who have not unsheathed weapons or joined forces against us. God has been good to you, so be good to them. If the Commander of the Faithful thinks it is a good idea to write a letter of amnesty to them and send it to me, let him do that.”

So Abū al-‘Abbās wrote a proclamation and sent it to Sulaymān ibn ‘Alī regarding the protection of anyone of Banū Umayya who took refuge with him. Abū Muslim used to call him “the [sheltering] cave of runaways”.

Al-Rashīd and ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Ṣālīḥ

‘Abd al-Malik ibn Ṣālīḥ went one day to see al-Rashīd. Hardly had he sat down when al-Rashīd turned to him and cited the following verse:

I want him to live and he wants to kill me,
Your friend's intention is your excuse.

Then he added, "By God, it is as though I see rain falling and lightning flashing; it is as though the threats have been translated into action and have resulted in finger joints without wrists and skulls without larynxes. Take it easy, take it easy! For, by God I will facilitate difficult things for you. Your murky situation will become clear and matters will come under your control. Take steps before a catastrophe happens that will hit you with its hand and kick you with its foot."

'Abd al-Malik asked, "Commander of the Faithful: is what you have spoken of one meaning or of double meaning?" "Of one meaning," al-Rashīd affirmed.

"Fear God," counseled 'Abd al-Malik, "and treat your relatives well and your subjects kindly, for they have been entrusted to you as their shepherd. Don't replace thankfulness with ingratitude or reward with punishment. I have given you sincere advice, offered you my obedience, strengthened your kingship by foundations heavier than Mount Yalamlam, and left your enemy like a path trodden underfoot. Remember God in your treatment of your relatives and don't break the relations you have established with them. The letter [you received] is a slander by a calumniator and an injustice by an unfair man aiming to mangle your ties with blood relatives. Many a full night have I suffered for your sake and many a grief have I relieved you from; and I was much as the poet of Banū Kilāb said:

Many a difficult situation have I relieved
By my tongue and position, and by argument.
If an elephant or its driver were to do that,
He would slip and slide off what I did."

Whereupon al-Rashīd was pleased with him and welcomed him, saying, "You have strengthened me."

Al-Rashīd and 'Abd al-Malik ibn Ṣāliḥ

Al-Rashīd turned to 'Abd al-Malik ibn Ṣāliḥ one day and chided him, "Are you not grateful to me for my favors? Do you betray me as your Imam?"

'Abd al-Malik said, "[If so,] I must then be burdened by regret, for I have attracted your resentment. But, Commander of the Faithful, that is nothing but an unfair accusation by an unjust man who was my rival in an old governor's position and in my right of being related to you. O Commander of the Faithful, you are the caliph of God and His Messenger, may God bless him and give him peace; you are the ruler of his community and the faithful guardian of his flock who have the duty to obey you and give you advice, and the right that you ascertain their deeds and rule them justly."

Hārūn [al-Rashīd] replied, "You tell me good things with your tongue but harbor ill will against me in your heart that angers God for me. Here is Qumāma, your secretary, who tells me about all your deeds."

“Is that true, Qumāma?” ‘Abd al-Malik asked.

“Yes,” Qumāma replied. “You wanted to deceive the Commander of the Faithful and betray him.”

“How can someone not lie behind my back who slanders me to my face?” ‘Abd al-Malik said.

“Here is your own son witnessing against you,” al-Rashīd added.

“Commander of the Faithful,” ‘Abd al-Malik said, “he is either ordered to do that or he is a recalcitrant son. If he is ordered, then he is to be excused; and if he is a recalcitrant son, I fear nothing more from his recalcitrance.”

Being angry with ‘Abd al-Malik, al-Rashīd said to him one day, “Do you have many bedbugs in al-Raqqa?” “Yes, and many fleas!” ‘Abd al-Malik replied. “Son of a whore!” said al-Rashīd. “I’ve asked you about one thing; why do you answer about two?” And he ordered that ‘Abd al-Malik be imprisoned. He continued to be in jail until al-Amīn [al-Rashīd’s son] released him.

Words by ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Ṣālīḥ after being released from prison

Ibrāhīm al-Sindī said, “I heard ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Ṣālīḥ say after being released from prison, mentioning al-Rashīd and his treatment of him, ‘By God, power is not something I intended or wished, nor something I planned for or wanted. If I had wanted it, it would have come faster to me than water would flowing downhill or fire to dry hay. I was arrested for a deed I did not commit, and was made responsible for something I did not know [anything about]. But he saw that I was worthy of power and significant for the caliphate; that if I stretched out my hand to it, I could obtain it; and that I had a character suitable for its qualifications and deserving of its duties – although I had not created those qualifications or designed those duties, nor had I been nominated for the caliphate in secret or referred to it in public. He saw that it was inclined to me like a loving mother and predisposed to me like an eager woman; and he was afraid that it might fancy a good desire and lean to a most fertile possibility. So he punished me as though I were a man who sought it avidly and made every effort to achieve it. If he thought I was suitable for it and it was suitable for me, and that I deserved it and it deserved me, this is not a crime I committed and have to repent, nor one I arrogated to myself and have to curb myself from. And if he claimed that his punishment was inevitable and that escape from it for me was unavoidable until I had given up my learning, discernment, and determination, this is as impossible for me as it is for a wastrel to be thrifty and a rational man to be foolish. It was equal to him whether he punished me for my learning and discernment or for my lineage and age, whether he punished me for my beauty or for the people’s affection for me. If I had wanted it, I would have obtained it faster than he could think to stop me, and I would have distracted him from planning to do so; for that aim would have needed little effort on my part.’”

Ibn Salm when he learned of the caliph's anger with Rajā'

Ibrāhīm ibn al-Sindi said, "I was walking with Sa'd ibn Salm when someone told him that the Commander of the Faithful had become angry with Rajā' ibn Abī al-Ḍaḥḥāk and had ordered that his wealth be confiscated. Sa'd was alarmed at that and became worried. 'What frightens you about him?' he was asked. 'By God, there is no kinship or causal connection between you and him.' 'Yes, there is,' he said, 'benefaction becomes a kinship between those who practice it and obedience becomes a sure causal connection between benefactors.'"

A king sent for a man he had become angry with. "O prince," the man said when he stood before the king, "Anger is a devil, so seek God's protection against him. Pardon has been created only for the guilty, and forgiveness only for the wrong-doer. Therefore don't put restrictions on your clemency and pardon, which have been ample enough to contain your subjects." Whereupon, the king pardoned him and set him free.

When Qutayba ibn Muslim accused Abū Mujliz of some misdeed, the latter said, "May God make the commander prosper, verify in order to be sure, for verification is half of pardon."

Al-Ḥajjāj said to a man who had come to see him, "Speak, you're master of your words." The man said, "I come with my offense, seek forgiveness of the Lord, and ask for relief." "We've pardoned you," said al-Ḥajjāj.

A king sent for a man he wanted to punish. When the man stood before the king, he said, "I ask you by Him before whom you are humbler than I am before you, and who is more powerful to punish you than you are to punish me: look into my case like someone for whom my healing is more likable than my sickness, and my innocence more likable than my crime."

Khālīd ibn 'Abd Allāh said to Sulaymān ibn 'Abd al-Malik who had become angry with him, "O Commander of the Faithful, power takes away rancor. You are far above punishment, and we admit our offense. So if you pardon me, you are worthy of that; and if you punish me, I deserve that."

Mu'āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān ordered that Rawḥ ibn Zinbā' be punished. "I beseech you by God, Commander of the Faithful," Rawḥ pleaded, "Don't disparage a mean quality in me that you have elevated, and don't undo a ply in me that you have entwined, and don't make an enemy you have defeated gloat over my misfortune; but let your clemency and pardon overcome my error and my ignorance." Mu'āwiya said, "Let him go. When God wants a thing to be done, He makes it easy."

'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān became angry at a man, so he shunned him and cast him away from his company. He later called him to ask him about something and saw that he was pale and gaunt. "How long have you been sick?" the caliph asked. The man said,

"I have not been touched by any sickness but
I shunned my self when the Commander shunned me.

“I promised myself not to be pleased with myself until the Commander of the Faithful was pleased with me.” And so, the caliph brought him back into his company.

Al-Ḥasan ibn Sahl sat down to meet Nu‘aym ibn Ḥāzim, and when the latter came, he was barefooted and bareheaded, and continued saying, “My offense is greater than heaven, my offense is greater than the earth.” “Take it easy, man,” al-Ḥasan said, “and don’t be afraid; for you’ve had acts of obedience before, and you’ve had acts of repentance too; and there is no place for offense between them. Even if there were such a place, your offense is not greater than the forgiveness of the Commander of the Faithful.”

Al-Maʾmūn and a Ḥāshimite offender

A man from the Banū Ḥāshim committed an offense against al-Maʾmūn, so the latter blamed him. “Commander of the Faithful,” the man said, “Whoever has the same familiarity with you as I have, is held in the high esteem I am held in, and is related to you through blood relationship as I am, will be forgiven a greater lapse than mine.” “You’re right, my cousin,” the caliph said and he pardoned him.

A man apologized to al-Maʾmūn for an offense, saying, “Although my lapse had completely enveloped my respect, your graciousness now envelops it and your magnanimity now stands upon it.”

Ṣarī‘ al-Ghawānī, “Victim of the Belles” [Muslim ibn al-Walīd], took this idea and said:

If my offense has enveloped my respect [for you],
Let your hoped-for pardon envelop my offense.

Al-Manṣūr and Yazīd ibn Hubayra

Yazīd ibn ‘Umar ibn Hubayra entered the presence of Abū Ja‘far al-Manṣūr after having been given a written amnesty and said, “Commander of the Faithful, your authority is virgin and your state is new. Make the people taste its sweetness and avoid its bitterness, and their hearts will find it easy to obey you and their souls will hasten to love you. I still find support for you growing slowly.” When he rose to go, Abū Ja‘far said, “I wonder at any one who orders the killing of this man!” Then he treacherously killed him after that.

Al-Manṣūr after the defeat of ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Alī

Al-Haytham ibn ‘Adī said, “When ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Alī was defeated and put to flight from Syria, a delegation of his followers went to al-Manṣūr and they spoke in his presence. Then al-Ḥārith stood up and said, ‘Commander of the Faithful, we are not a delegation of boasting but rather a delegation of repentance. We were afflicted with a [desire for] sedition that made light of our noble men and provoked our mild men. We admit what we have done, and we apologize for

what happened. If you punish us, we have admittedly committed a crime; and if you pardon us, you have often been kind to those among us who have done evil.' Al-Manṣūr said to al-Ḥarāsī, 'This man is their [best] orator!' And he ordered that his estates in al-Ghūṭa be returned to him."

Tamīm ibn Jamīl in front of al-Muṭaṣim

Aḥmad ibn Abī Duwād said, "We have never seen a man facing death who has not been worried by that or distracted from what he wanted to do except Tamīm ibn Jamīl. He had gained the mastery over the bank of the Euphrates and the messenger brought him to the gate of al-Muṭaṣim, the Commander of the Faithful, on the Day of the Procession when the caliph usually sat to listen to the common people. When he entered and stood before the caliph, the latter ordered that the executioner's leather mat and sword be brought, so they were. Tamīm ibn Jamīl, who was robust and handsome, started looking at them without saying anything and al-Muṭaṣim began to look him up and down, thinking of interrogating him to see how much heart and tongue he had in relation to his appearance. 'Tamīm,' the caliph said, 'If you have an excuse, let me hear it; and if you have an argument, advance it.'

"Tamīm said, 'Now that the Commander of the Faithful has permitted me to speak, I will therefore say: Praise be to God who did well every thing He created, and began by creating man from clay, then made his progeny from an insignificant drop of water. O Commander of the Faithful: my crimes render my tongue speechless and my heart troubled. My sin is great, my crime considerable, and your opinion of me bad. Nothing remains but your pardon or your vengeance, and I hope that the nearer of them to you and the one that comes faster will be the more worthy to be thankful for and the more similar to your qualities.' Then he recited the following verses:

I see death lurking between the sword and the leather mat,
 Observing me wherever I turn.
 I think you will most probably kill me today;
 What man can escape what God preordains?
 And who can offer an excuse and an argument
 When the sword of death is unsheathed between his eyes?
 This situation is hard on al-Aws ibn Taghlib:
 That a sword is unsheathed against me and I keep silent!
 I am not afraid that I will die
 For I know death is a temporary thing.
 But I will leave children behind me
 Whose hearts will be broken by grief.
 I imagine seeing them, as my death is announced to them,
 Scratching their faces and wailing.
 If I live, they will live in comfort and happiness
 And I will protect them from death; but if I die, they will too.

Many a man will say, 'May God not send his soul far away,'
But many another will rejoice and gloat.

"Al-Muṭaṣim smiled and said, 'By God, the sword was about to foreclose any blame, Tamīm. Go, I have forgiven your childish recklessness and have left you alive for the sake of the children.'"

Al-Mahdī and Abū 'Ubayd Allāh

It was related that the Commander of the Faithful, al-Mahdī, said to Abū 'Ubayd Allāh after having killed his son, "If your son had loyalty which would have made it incumbent on us to pardon him because of your good service and of your obedience that we know, the Commander of the Faithful would not have forgone it and chosen another action. But your son took to his heels and reneged, and he was ungrateful to his Lord." Abū 'Ubayd Allāh said, "Our satisfaction or anger with ourselves is related to your satisfaction or anger with us. We are the servants of your grace: you reward us for our good deeds, so we give thanks; and you punish us for wrong doing, so we bear that patiently."

Al-Manṣūr and Ja'far ibn Muḥammad

Abū al-Ḥasan al-Madā'īnī said, "When al-Manṣūr went on pilgrimage, he passed by Medina, and there he said to his chamberlain, al-Rabī', 'Bring me Ja'far ibn Muḥammad. May God kill me if I don't kill him.' Excuses were made for the delay of Ja'far's attendance but al-Manṣūr insisted that he should come. When the curtain between them was raised and Ja'far faced the caliph, he moved his lips in a whisper, then approached and greeted him. 'May God not greet you, enemy of God,' the caliph fumed. 'You hatch plots against me in my kingdom? May God kill me if I don't kill you.' 'Commander of the Faithful,' Ja'far pleaded, 'Solomon, God bless Muḥammad and him, was given and he thanked; Job was afflicted and he was patient; and Joseph was wronged and he forgave. You are an heir of theirs and the most worthy person to follow their example.' Abū Ja'far [al-Manṣūr] lowered his head for a long while as Ja'far stood before him, then he raised his head and said, 'Come to me, Abū 'Abd Allāh. You are a close relative of mine, connected to me by blood kinship; you have a good heart and no evil desire.' With his right hand, he then shook Ja'far's hand; and with his left, he embraced him. He seated him with him on his bed, having moved to make place for him on it; and he turned toward him attentively, conversing with him and asking him questions. Calling his chamberlain, he then said, 'O Rabī'. Hasten to give Abū 'Abd Allāh the suit, the reward, and the permission that are his due.'

"Al-Rabī' said, 'When the curtain separated me from the caliph, I took hold of Ja'far by his clothes and he said, "Rabī', I thought we were going to be imprisoned." "Don't worry," I said, "this is my affair and not his." He said,

“This is now easier for me. Ask what you need.” I said, “For the last three nights, I have been protecting you and concealing things about you. I noticed that you whispered something when you entered, then I saw that your difficulty was dispelled. I am a servant of a ruler and cannot live without him; I would therefore like you to teach me what you whispered.” He said, “Very well. I whispered: O God, guard me with your eyes that don’t sleep, and surround me with your protection that can’t be removed. I shall not perish when you are my hope. How many a blessing You have bestowed on me for which I have not thanked You, but You have not deprived me of it; and how many a calamity I have been afflicted with in which I was not patient, but You have not forsaken me. In You, God, I seek refuge from his desire to slaughter me, and in Your goodness I seek protection from his evil. You are powerful over everything. May God’s blessing and peace be on our master Muḥammad and his family.””

Sulaymān ibn ‘Abd al-Malik and Yazīd ibn Rāshid

Al-Madā’inī said, “Yazīd ibn Rāshid was an orator and was one of those who called for the deposition of Sulaymān ibn ‘Abd al-Malik and for offering the pledge of allegiance to ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn al-Walīd, and so Sulaymān made a vow to cut off his tongue. When the caliphate devolved on Sulaymān and Yazīd ibn Rāshid entered to see him, he sat in deep thought on the edge of the carpet, then he [rose and] said, ‘Commander of the Faithful, be like God’s Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace: he was afflicted, so he endured patiently; he was given, so he thanked gratefully; and he was empowered, so he forgave magnanimously.’ The caliph asked, ‘And who are you?’ ‘Yazīd ibn Rāshid,’ Yazīd answered. So the caliph forgave him.”

Al-Rashīd and a man he imprisoned

Al-Rashīd imprisoned a man. When his imprisonment turned out to be too long, the man wrote to him, “Every day that passes on your happiness is a day that passes on my misery. The end is near and judgment is God’s.” So al-Rashīd set him free.

Asad al-Qasrī and a *dihqān* being tortured

Passing by one of the tax bureaux when he was governor of Khurāsān, Asad ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Qasrī saw a *dihqān* [a provincial grandee] being tortured in his prison cell. Poor people around Asad begged him for alms and he ordered that an amount of dirhams be divided among them. The *dihqān* said, “Asad: if you would give alms to someone upon whom mercy is to be shown, then show mercy to someone who has been wronged; for heaven opens up to the supplication of the wronged one. Asad: beware of the one who has no helper but God, and fear the one who has no shield but imploring God. Injustice has a disastrous end; so let no one be deceived by the slowness of help that comes from a Helper

who, when He wants to hearken to a prayer, grants it; and who gives certain people a long respite so that their sins may increase.” Thereupon, Asad ordered that the man’s ill-treatment cease.

Al-Maʾmūn and a man of his retinue

Al-Maʾmūn reproved a man of his retinue, and the man responded, “Commander of the Faithful: an old reverence and a new repentance erase a wrong deed committed between them.” “You are right,” the caliph said and was pleased with him.

A Persian king and his cook

One of the kings of Persia ruling a great kingdom was a man of vengeful temper. A drop of food fell on his hand when his cook was once serving him, and he frowned. The cook realized that he was going to be killed as a result, so he emptied the whole platter on the king’s hands. “Bring him to me,” the king ordered. When the cook came, the king said to him, “I can understand that the fall of one drop [of food] was an accident, but what is your excuse for the second?” “I was embarrassed,” the cook explained, “that the king should kill someone of my age and of my long reverence for him because of only one drop; so I wanted my crime to be big enough so that my killing by him would look good.” The king retorted, “Your subtle excuse may save you from being killed, but it is not going to save you from being punished. Whip him one hundred lashes and let him go.”

Al-Maʾmūn and Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Malik

Al-Shaybānī said, “Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Ṣāliḥ went to see al-Maʾmūn when the latter had confiscated his kin’s estates, and he said, ‘Commander of the Faithful: Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Malik is in your presence, a foster son of your state, a creature of your kindness, and a branch of your great tree. Will you permit me to speak?’ ‘Yes,’ the caliph said. Muḥammad continued, ‘We ask God to grant you long life so that our religion and world may be preserved, and our near and far ones may be taken care of. We ask Him to increase your years by adding to them from ours, to enhance your influence by strengthening it with ours, and to protect you from harm with the help of our eyes and ears. This is the situation of someone who takes refuge in your graciousness and escapes to your fold for protection, being greatly in need of your compassion and justice.’ Muḥammad then asked what he needed and al-Maʾmūn granted it.”

ʿUbayd ibn Ayyūb and al-Ḥajjāj

ʿUbayd ibn Ayyūb was sought by al-Ḥajjāj for a crime he had committed, but he escaped and wrote him the following verses:

Let me taste sleep or else seek the truth about me;
 If I am proven guilty, then cut off my fingers.
 You've shaken my heart and it is now scared,
 And I'm made to move from one empty desert to another.

But no poet expressed this idea better than al-Nābigha al-Dhubaynī when he said to al-Nu'mān ibn al-Mundhir:

May you be far above being cursed, I've heard you blamed me;
 And this has shocked and deafened my ears.
 I've become like someone attacked by a spotted snake
 In whose fangs lies deadly poison.
 Are you accusing me of another man's crime and ignoring him
 Like a mangy camel grazing freely while another is cauterized?
 You are like night which overtakes me [wherever I go],
 Even if I imagine that the world's end is safe for me.

He also said to him in another poem:

You can't keep a brother whom you don't accept
 With all his faults. Is there a perfect man?
 If I am wronged, I am only a servant you've wronged.
 If you blame me, someone like you is entitled to blame.
 I have sworn, leaving no room for suspicion in your heart
 (No man can swear by anything greater than God's name),
 That, if you've been told of a crime I committed,
 Your slanderous informant is indeed a most deceitful liar.
 Don't you see that God has given you an honorable status
 Which makes every king waver and shake before it?
 You are a sun and the other kings are mere stars:
 When it shines, not a single star of them is visible.

Ibn al-Ṭathriyya said:

Consider me either as a man whom you know to be innocent
 Or as a wrong-doer who has repented and offered apologies.
 You are like a sick person seeking a physician for his illness
 And, when he doesn't find one, he treats himself by himself.

Al-Mumazzaq al-ʿAbdī said to ʿAmr ibn Hind:

Son of the clouds, son of Muḥarraḡ: my she-camel travels
 To you morning and evening, her litter always saddled.
 May you be far above being cursed, is it true that the son
 Of our clouds makes me choke by wrongly accusing me?
 If I am to be eaten, may you be the best eater;
 Otherwise, hasten to help me before I am torn to pieces.
 You are the people's leader; whatever you say, we say too
 And whatever falsehood you decry will have no followers.

ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān cited these verses in his letter to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib on the Day of al-Dār.

Ibn al-Zayyāt seeking al-Mutawakkil's sympathy

When Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Malik al-Zayyāt felt he was dying while imprisoned by al-Mutawakkil, he wrote him a note in which were the following verses:

This is the way [of life] from day to day:
It is like what your eyes show you in sleep.
Don't hurry, take it easy; for it is in constant change,
A world changing hands from group to group.
Even if you may rejoice in the morning,
Death hovers above you in circles – fatefully.

When the note reached al-Mutawakkil and he read it, he ordered that Muḥammad be released; but he was found dead.

ʿAmr ibn Muʿāwiya ibn ʿAmr ibn ʿUtba said to al-Manṣūr, who was about to punish a man, “Commander of the Faithful: revenge is justice but forgiveness is gracious; and the person who is gracious is by far above the one who is just. We pray that the Commander of the Faithful be guarded against accepting for himself the lesser of the two lots without reaching the higher of the two grades.

Abū Muslim and some of his generals

In a conversation that took place between Abū Muslim [al-Khurāsānī], leader of the [ʿAbbasid] cause, and one of his generals named Shahrām, the general said words that contained some boorishness which he later regretted, and he continued to humble himself and entreat Abū Muslim in order to clear himself of them. “Don't worry,” Abū Muslim said to him, “it is a slip of the tongue and an error of fancy. Anger is a demon indeed. I have emboldened you to be scurrilous with me because of my toleration. If you intentionally spoke so offensively, I am as much to blame as you for it. However, if you were simply constrained, apology is available for you. And we have forgiven you, at any rate.” “May God prosper the commander,” the general said, “forgiveness by someone like you is not out of conceit.” “That's right,” Abū Muslim agreed. “But the immensity of the offense,” the general continued, “does not allow my heart to be at rest.” And he apologized insistently. “How strange you are!” Abū Muslim said, “You offended and I was nice. Now that you are nice, shall I offend?”

Al-Ma'mūn and Abū Dulaf

After having been reprovved then dismissed by al-Ma'mūn, Abū Dulaf went in to see him. When all others who had been present left, the caliph said to Abū Dulaf, “Say something, Abū Dulaf; and what will you possibly say, now that the

Commander of the Faithful has become pleased with you and has forgiven what you have done?" Abū Dulaf said, "Commander of the Faithful:

[I'd like to have] nights which joyfully bring me near you,
With your face beaming with the light of friendly cheer.
I wonder, who can restore to me the attitude which
You had toward me in the good old days?"

Al-Ma'mūn reassured him, "I can restore it, and you will come back to mutual counseling and your former obedient service." And he returned him to the relationship he had previously had with him.

On another day, al-Ma'mūn said to him, "You are the one who says:

I am a man of Chosroës-like deeds.
I spend my summers in the mountains and my winters in Iraq.

"But I don't see that you have done anything to prove your obedience to us or performed a duty to show your respect for us." "Commander of the Faithful," Abū Dulaf answered, "In your benefaction, we are your servants. Shedding my blood in obeying you is only some of what I owe you."

Abū Dulaf entered the presence of al-Ma'mūn, and the latter said to him, "You are the one about whom Ibn Jabala said:

Between his present life and his death,
Abū Dulaf is the whole world.
When Abū Dulaf passes away
The whole world passes away after him."

"This is false testimony, Commander of the Faithful," Abū Dulaf replied, "It is the lie of a poet and the flattery of a beggar. But I am the one whose nephew says about him:

Let me wander about the world seeking wealth
For al-Karkh is not the whole world, nor is Qāsim all people."

Al-Karkh was where Abū Dulaf's family lived, and his name was Qāsim ibn 'Abdallah.

Al-Manṣūr and Ma'n ibn Zā'ida

Al-Manṣūr said to Ma'n ibn Zā'ida, "I don't think that what was said about your injustice and your oppression of the people of Yemen is anything but the truth." "How is that so, Commander of the Faithful?" Ma'n asked. "I was told," explained the caliph, "that you gave a poet one thousand dinars for a verse he had said." And he recited the following [two-hemistich] verse:

Ma'n ibn Zā'ida is the one by whom Banū Shaybān
Have been increased, glory after glory.

“Yes, Commander of the Faithful,” Maʿn replied, “I gave him one thousand dinars, but that was for his verses in which he says:

In the Battle of al-Hāshimiyya, you unsheathed your sword
 Defending Compassionate God’s caliph.
 You rendered his realm impregnable and protected him
 From the blows of swords and spearheads.”

Al-Manṣūr was embarrassed and scratched up the ground with his cane. He then raised his head and said, “Sit down, [and be comfortable] Abū al-Walid.”

ʿAbd al-Malik and a bedouin who stole

A bedouin who had stolen was brought to ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān and the latter ordered that his hand be cut off. The bedouin recited the following verses:

Commander of the Faithful, I pray that though your pardon
 My hand will not end in a place that will cause it shame.
 There would be no good in the world that I would love
 If my left hand were abandoned by its right hand.

But the caliph insisted that his hand be cut off. The bedouin’s mother pleaded, “He is my only son and breadwinner.” “What a miserable breadwinner he has been to you!” the caliph commented. “Cutting off the hand [for theft] is a punishment prescribed by God,” he added. “Commander of the Faithful,” she begged, “consider his deed one of your sins for which you seek God’s forgiveness.” So the caliph pardoned him.

Reminding kings of promises

Al-Maʿmūn and Ibn Ashras

Thumāma ibn Ashras said to al-Maʿmūn when the latter became caliph, “I had two hopes: one for you and one to be realized by you. As for my hope for you, I have achieved it; and as for my hope to be realized by you, I don’t know what you will have for me.” “You will have the best that you wished and hoped for,” said the caliph. And he made him one of his evening companions and private entourage.

Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Abrash

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, “When Yazīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik died and Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik became caliph, his friends prostrated themselves before him except al-Abrash al-Kalbi. “O Abrash, what prevented you from prostrating yourself as they did?” the new caliph asked. “Commander of the Faithful: because you went away from us and abandoned us,” replied al-Abrash. “What if I will take

you with me?” asked the caliph. “Will you do that, Commander of the Faithful?” al-Abrash asked. “Yes,” the caliph assured him. “Now is prostration sweet,” al-Abrash said, and he prostrated himself.

Abū Ja‘far and a friend of his congratulating him

When the caliphate devolved on Abū Ja‘far [al-Manṣūr], a man among his friends wrote to him the following verses:

We are your retinue who
Endured what you endured.
When we’re seen, we’re known for enmity and
Estrangement to those you feel estrangement toward.
Out of our concern for you, we act
As watchful scouts when the night is calm.
This is the time for the fulfillment
Of promises you have earlier made.

At the end of each of those verses, Abū Ja‘far wrote, “You’re right, you’re right.” Then he called him and attached him to his private entourage.

The poet Ḥabīb said the following verses on this idea:

The worthiest of all clients to be comforted by you in good
Times, is the one who comforted you in times of sorrow.
Noble men are those who, when they prosper, remember
Those who were their friends in times of adversity.

Clever words to escape from the ruler

Al-‘Abbās ibn Sahl and ‘Uthmān ibn Ḥayyān

Abū al-Ḥasan al-Madā’inī said, “Al-‘Abbās ibn Sahl was the governor of Medina under ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr. But when the people pledged allegiance to ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān as caliph, the latter appointed ‘Uthmān ibn Ḥayyān al-Murri [as governor of Medina] and ordered him to be severe with people of doubtful loyalty to him. One day ‘Uthmān alluded to the sedition and its supporters, and a man said to him, ‘But look, al-‘Abbās ibn Sahl is still as he has always been; he supported al-Zubayr and was one of his governors.’ ‘Woe to me!’ ‘Uthmān ibn Ḥayyān said, ‘By God, I will kill him.’

“Al-‘Abbās said, ‘I was told about that, so I absented myself until my absence hurt me. Then I approached some of his companions and I said to them, ‘Why should I be afraid of him when Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān has assured my safety?’ They said, ‘By God, whenever he mentions you, he becomes angry with you. But if he is spoken to about a crime when he is eating, he usually becomes glad; we therefore suggest that you disguise yourself and attend his dinner, and then speak to him.’

“So I did. And when he was being served at dinner a dish of sopped bread and meat from a large bowl, I said to him, ‘By God, it is as if I see the bowl of Ḥayyān ibn Maʿbad, with people crowding over it, as he was going about among his retinue and checking whether their interests were being served and, meanwhile, dragging his silk clothes and not removing the thorns clinging to them; he was then brought a bowl carried with difficulty by four men. After the people finished eating and went away from the food, he was approached by those of his relatives that were present and by the unexpected visitors among the notables of his tribe, most of whom had no need for food but wanted only the honor of being at his dining table and participating in his actions.’

“He said, ‘Wow! Have you yourself seen that?’ I said, ‘Yes, by God.’ ‘Who are you?’ he asked. I said, ‘Will I be safe?’ ‘Yes,’ he said. ‘I am al-ʿAbbās ibn Sahl ibn Saʿd al-Anṣārī,’ I said. ‘Welcome,’ he said, ‘Yours are people of honor and truth.’ Since then, I have been to him the most respected man in Medina.

“He was later asked, ‘Have you really seen Ḥayyān ibn Maʿbad dragging his silk clothes and people crowding over his dining table?’ ‘By God,’ he said, ‘I saw him when we camped at that fountain, and he came to us wearing a cloak of lamb’s wool; so we began to chase him away from our saddlebags lest he should steal them.’”

Al-Mukhtār and Surāqa

Abū Ḥātim said, “Abū ʿUbayda related the following to us, ‘Surāqa ibn Mirdās al-Bāriqī was taken prisoner at the Battle of Jabbālat al-Subayʿ [in al-Kūfa] and was brought with the captives to al-Mukhtār. Surāqa said:

Be benevolent to me today, O best man of the tribe of Maʿadd,
O best man to answer [God’s] call, pray, and prostrate himself.

‘So al-Mukhtār pardoned him and released him.

“‘Then Surāqa joined Ishāq ibn al-Ashʿath’s rebellion and was brought to al-Mukhtār as a prisoner, and the latter asked him, ‘Haven’t I pardoned you and been benevolent to you? By God, I will kill you now.’ “No, by God,” Surāqa said, “you will not, if God wills.” “Why not?” asked al-Mukhtār. “Because,” Surāqa explained, “my father told me that you would conquer Syria and destroy Damascus to the last stone, and I would be with you.” Then he recited the following verses:

Lo, tell Abū Ishāq [al-Mukhtār] that
We launched an attack which was indefensible.
We had no consideration for the weak ones among us
And our rebellion was reckless and leading to death.
In their battle lines, you could see they were few in numbers
But they were like locusts when we met [the enemy].
Be then generously forgiving, now that you have won, for

If we had won, we would have governed unfairly.
 Accept my repentance, for I will thank you
 If you will consider what you give me now as a debt.

‘So he released him.

‘Then Ishāq ibn al-Ash‘ath rebelled again and Surāqa joined him, was taken prisoner, and was brought to al-Mukhtār. The latter said to him, “I praise God who enabled me to lay my hands on you, enemy of God. This is the third time.” Surāqa said, “By God, who are those who captured me? Where are they? I don’t see them. When we met, we saw men who wore white clothes and rode piebald horses flying between heaven and earth.” Al-Mukhtār said, “Release him so that he may tell other people.””

Yet Surāqa called again for fighting against al-Mukhtār and said:

Lo! Who will tell al-Mukhtār on my behalf
 That the piebald horses are pure black?
 I make my eyes see what they did not see:
 My eyes and I know the world of falsehoods.
 I don’t believe in your “Revelation” and I have vowed
 I will fight you until I die.

Ma‘n ibn Zā‘ida and some captives

Ma‘n ibn Zā‘ida had ordered the killing of a group of captives when the youngest of them rose up to him and said, “Ma‘n, will you kill the captives when they are thirsty?” So Ma‘n ordered that they be given water. When they drank, the young man asked, “O Ma‘n, will you kill your guests?” Thereupon, Ma‘n ordered that they be set free.

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and al-Hurmuzān

When al-Hurmuzān was brought to ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb as a captive, he was invited by ‘Umar to join Islam but he declined, so ‘Umar ordered that he be put to death. When he caught sight of the sword, he said, “Commander of the Faithful, I wish you would order that I be brought a drink of water; for that would be better than putting me to death when I am thirsty.” So ‘Umar ordered a drink of water for him. When the receptacle was in his hand, he asked, “Will I be safe until I drink?” “Yes,” ‘Umar replied. Al-Hurmuzān let the receptacle fall from his hand and said, “O Commander of the Faithful: Fulfillment [of a promise], is a bright light.” ‘Umar said, “You’re granted a pause until I look into the matter. Hold off the sword from him.” When the sword was held off, al-Hurmuzān said, “Now I testify that there is no god but God alone, with no partners, and that Muḥammad is His servant and His apostle.” “Woe is you!” ‘Umar said, “You’ve adopted Islam in the best manner. What delayed you [earlier]?” He replied, “I was afraid, O Commander of the Faithful, that it would

be said that my adoption of Islam was only because I feared death.” ‘Umar commented, “Persia has indeed men of reason and discernment, and it is through them that she deserved the dominion it had.” Afterwards, ‘Umar used to consult him regarding the armies he sent to the land of Persia, and he used to act in accordance with his advice.

Al-Ḥajjāj and some captives who rebelled with Ibn al-Ash‘ath

When the captives who had rebelled with Ibn al-Ash‘ath were brought to al-Ḥajjāj, he ordered that they be put to death. One of them said, “May God prosper the commander, I have done you a good turn.” “What is it?” al-Ḥajjāj asked. “You were mentioned by the soldiers of Ibn al-Ash‘ath,” the man explained, “and your parents were reviled, so I defended them and said, ‘By God, his lineage is above reproach. Say anything you like about him but leave his lineage alone.’” “And who would know what you had said?” al-Ḥajjāj asked. The man turned around to the nearest captive and said, “This man knows.” Al-Ḥajjāj asked him, “What do you say about what he says?” “May God prosper the commander,” the other captive said, “he has been truthful and honest.” Al-Ḥajjāj said, “Release this man for his backing and that one for upholding his testimony.”

Rawḥ ibn Ḥātim and a thief

‘Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ said, “Rawḥ ibn Ḥātim was brought a man who had committed acts of robbery on the road to al-Riqāq, so he ordered that he be put to death. ‘May God prosper the commander,’ the man said, ‘I have done you a good deed.’ ‘What is it?’ al-Ḥajjāj asked. The man replied, ‘One day you came to the council of our clients, the Banū Nahshal, and the assembly was full and no one made ready to give up his seat for you. So I rose from my seat and you sat on it. If it were not for your genuine generosity, your honorable rank, and your eminent priority, I would not have reminded you of this matter in a situation like this one.’ Ibn Ḥātim said, ‘He has spoken truly,’ and he ordered that he be set free, appointed him to govern that area, and made him responsible for it.”

When al-Maʾmūn caught Abū Dulaf, who had been fleeing in the mountains, he ordered that his head be cut off. Abū Dulaf pleaded, “Commander of the Faithful, let me pray two *rak‘as*.” The caliph said, “Do.” So Abū Dulaf prayed and wrote a few verses, then he stood before al-Maʾmūn and recited:

Sell the people for me, and I will be
A substitute for those you have sold.
And take me as your coat of mail
From which all others have recoiled.
And shoot me at every enemy,
For I am a swift arrow.

Thereupon al-Ma'mūn set him free and appointed him to govern that area, which he improved and cultivated.

Mu'āwiya and an Iraqi captive

At the Battle of Šiffin, Mu'āwiya was brought an Iraqi captive, so he said, "Praise be to God who enabled me to lay my hands on you!" "Don't say that, Mu'āwiya," the man said, "for in fact it is a calamity!" Mu'āwiya said, "What blessing is there that is greater than being enabled by God to lay my hands on a man who had killed a group of my friends in one hour? Boy: behead him!" The captive said, "O God, be witness to the fact that Mu'āwiya does not kill me for Your sake, nor because You are pleased with my killing, but because he aims to be victorious over the ephemeral things of this world. If he kills me, deal with him as he deserves; and if he does not, then deal with him as You deserve." "Woe to you!" Mu'āwiya said, "You have reviled and been eloquent; and you have invoked God and done well. Let him go."

Muṣ'ab ibn al-Zubayr and a supporter of al-Mukhtār

Muṣ'ab ibn al-Zubayr ordered that a supporter of al-Mukhtār be beheaded. The man said, "How ugly you will become on the Day of Resurrection when I will rise to this beautiful form of yours and to this face of yours that gives light to others, and I will cling to your extremities and say, 'O Lord, ask this man why he killed me?'" Muṣ'ab said, "Set him free." The man said, "Make the life you have just granted me a life of ease and comfort." "Give him one hundred thousand [dirhams]," Muṣ'ab said. "May I ransom you with my father and mother," the captive retorted, "I testify that Qays al-Ruqayyāt will receive fifty thousand of them." "Why?" asked Muṣ'ab. The man said, "Because he said the following verses about you:

Muṣ'ab is indeed a star from God
And his face disperses the darkness.
His rule is a rule of mercy in which
There is no power to be feared and no haughtiness.
He fears God in all matters; and he whose
Concern is the fear of God will succeed."

Muṣ'ab laughed and said, "I see in you a possibility of benefit." And he ordered that the man be attached to him and he treated him well. The man continued to be with him until he was killed.

ʿAbd al-Malik and a man he ordered to be killed

ʿAbd al-Malik ordered that a man be killed, and the latter said, "You are strongest when you are most needy of God." So ʿAbd al-Malik pardoned him.

Al-Ḥajjāj and Kharijite captives

Al-Ḥajjāj was brought some captives who were Kharijites, so he ordered that they be beheaded. A young man among them advanced forward and said, “By God, O Ḥajjāj, if we have erred in committing an offense, you have not done well in practicing pardon.” “Oh for these cadavers!” grumbled al-Ḥajjāj, “Would that there had not been among them anyone who would say this.” And he refrained from killing them.

Al-Ḥajjāj was brought some captives and he ordered that they be killed. A man among them said, “O Ḥajjāj, may God not reward you for any good you have done for the Sunna, for God Most High says, ‘And when you encounter the unbelievers, smite their necks; and when you have made wide slaughter among them, bind them fast; then release them either as a favor or by taking ransom.’ [Q. 47:4] This is what God says in His Book. Furthermore, your poet said in his description of his people regarding their noble manners:

We do not kill captives but rather unbind them
When their necks ache with the burden of their necklaces.”

Al-Ḥajjāj said, “Woe to you! Have you been unable to tell me what this hypocrite has told me?” And he refrained from killing the rest.

Al-Ḥajjāj and a Ḥarūrite woman

Al-Haytham ibn ‘Adī said, “A Ḥarūrite woman was brought to al-Ḥajjāj, and he said to his companions, ‘What do you think of this woman?’ They said, ‘May God prosper the commander, kill her and make an example of her to the others.’ The Ḥarūrite woman smiled. ‘Why do you smile?’ al-Ḥajjāj asked her. ‘The ministers of Pharaoh, your brother, were better than yours, Ḥajjāj,’ the woman answered, ‘for he asked their advice regarding the killing of Moses and they said to him, “Give him and his brother hope,” and these [your ministers] order you to hasten my killing.’ Al-Ḥajjāj laughed and ordered her release.”

Mu‘āwiya threatened Yūnus al-Thaqafī, saying, “I shall make you fly and you will find alighting slow.” Yūnus asked, “Is not my return and yours to God?” “Yes,” Mu‘āwiya replied. “Then, I will seek God’s forgiveness,” Yūnus said.

A man from the Banū Makhzūm, who was a supporter of al-Zubayr, entered to see ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān, and the latter asked him, “Hasn’t God made you retrace your steps?” The man replied, “Whoever returns to you, Commander of the Faithful, has already retraced his steps.” ‘Abd al-Malik was struck dumb and knew he had erred.

Yazīd ibn Abī Muslim entered to see Sulaymān ibn ‘Abd al-Malik, and the latter said to him, “May God’s curse be on him who gave you command, audacity, and power over the [Muslim] community: do you think al-Ḥajjāj has come to rest at the bottom of Hell yet or is he still falling down into it?”

Yazīd replied, "On the Day of Resurrection, al-Ḥajjāj's place will be between your brother and your father; so place him in hellfire wherever you like."

ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ziyād said to Qays ibn ʿAbbād, "What do you think of me and al-Ḥusayn?" "Exempt me from answering, may God give you health," Qays pleaded. "You must answer, without fail," ʿUbayd Allāh insisted. Qays said, "On the Day of Resurrection, his father will come and intercede for him, and your father will intercede for you." ʿUbayd Allāh said, "Now I know your perfidy and wickedness. Don't you ever rebel against me, for I will then surely put the hairiest part of you in the ground."

Al-Ḥajjāj and Ibn Yaʿmar regarding al-Ḥusayn

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, "Al-Ḥajjāj sent for Yaḥyā ibn Yaʿmar and [when he came] he said to him, 'Are you the one who says that al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī, the cousin of God's Messenger, God bless him and grant him peace, is the son of God's Messenger? I adjure you to bring me your excuse for what you said or I will strike off your head.' Ibn Yaʿmar asked, 'Will I be safe if I bring my excuse?' 'Yes,' al-Ḥajjāj assured him. Ibn Yaʿmar said, 'Read [the Qurʾanic verses]: "And that is Our argument which We gave to Abraham against his people. We exalt in degrees whomsoever We please; your Lord is wise and knowing. And we gave him Isaac and Jacob, each of whom We guided, and Noah whom we guided before; and of his progeny, David and Solomon and Job and Joseph and Moses and Aaron, thus We reward those who do good; and Zachariah and John and Jesus ..." [Q. 6:83–85] Now who is nearer [in filiation]: Jesus to Abraham or al-Ḥusayn to Muḥammad, God bless him and grant him peace, who is his daughter's son?' Al-Ḥajjāj said, 'By God, it is as if I have never read these verses earlier.' And he appointed Ibn Yaʿmar as judge of his town, a post he retained until he died."

Al-Ḥajjāj and Ibn Abī Laylā

Abū Bakr ibn Shayba said, on the basis of his chain of authorities, "ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Laylā went to see al-Ḥajjāj. The latter said to his companions sitting with him, 'If you would like to see a man reviling the Commander of the Faithful ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān, here he is,' meaning ʿAbd al-Raḥmān. But ʿAbd al-Raḥmān said, 'God forbid that I should revile the Commander of the Faithful, for there are three verses in the Book of God which prevent me from doing so. God Most High said, "[Spoils are] for the poor Emigrants who have been driven out of their homes and their possessions, who seek God's bounty and His pleasure, and who help God and His Messenger. These are the truthful ones." [Q. 59:8] And ʿUthmān [ibn ʿAffān] was one of them. Then God said, "And [spoils are for] those who dwelled in their abode and in faith before them, and who love those who have emigrated to them and do not find in their breasts any need for what they have been given, and prefer others to themselves even

though poverty is their lot; and [spoils are also for] whosoever guards against avarice in his own soul. These are the successful ones.” [Q. 59:9] And my father was one of them. Then God said, “And those who came after them say, ‘Our Lord, forgive us and our brothers who preceded us in faith, and do not put into our hearts any rancor against those who believe. Our Lord, You are kind and compassionate.’ [Q. 59:10] And I am one of them.” Al-Ḥajjāj said, ‘You have spoken truly.’”

Al-Ḥajjāj and ‘Āṣim ibn Abī Wā’il

On the authority of ‘Āṣim ibn Abī Wā’il, Abū ‘Awāna said, “Al-Ḥajjāj sent for me and asked, ‘What is your name?’ I said, ‘The commander would not have sent for me unless he knew my name!’ He asked, ‘When have you arrived in this town?’ I replied, ‘When its inhabitants did.’ He asked, ‘How much of the Qur’ān can you recite?’ I said, ‘I recite as much of it as would be sufficient for me if I live by it.’ He explained, ‘I would like to seek your help in my administration.’ I said, ‘If you seek my help, you are seeking the help of a stupid old man, who is weak and fears [being exploited by] evil helpers; and if you leave me alone, that is what I prefer; but if you force me, I will force myself.’ Al-Ḥajjāj said, ‘If I don’t find someone else, I will force you; but if I find someone else, I will not force you.’ I said, ‘One more thing, may God honor the commander: I know that the people have never feared a commander as much as they have feared you; I lie awake in my bed at night, tossing and mumbling, and sleep does not come to me until morning because of my thinking of you – and this is so, when I hold no administrative position by an appointment from you.’ He said, ‘Hey! What did you say?’ So I repeated to him what I had said. He said, ‘By God, I know no person on earth who is readier to shed blood than myself. Go away.’ So I stood up to go and swerved from the right way as though I could not see. Al-Ḥajjāj said, ‘Guide the old man.’”

Al-Ḥajjāj and the captives of al-Jamājim

Al-Ḥajjāj was brought the captives of [the Battle of] al-Jamājim, and among them were ‘Āmir al-Sha‘bī, Muṭarrif ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Shikhhīr, and Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr. Al-Sha‘bī and Muṭarrif believed in the dissimulation of one’s religious belief under duress, whereas Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr did not. ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān had written to al-Ḥajjāj saying, “The captives of [the Battle of] al-Jamājim should be put to the sword. However, those of them who admit to being infidels by rebelling against us should be set free; and those among them who claim they still believe [in rebellion against us] should be executed.” Al-Ḥajjāj said to al-Sha‘bī, “You are one of those who incited others against us with Ibn al-Ash‘ath, aren’t you? Testify then that you are an infidel.” “May God prosper the commander,” said al-Sha‘bī. “Our homes were far, our living as strangers made us rugged, fear nestled in our hearts, sleeplessness blackened our eyelids as

though with kohl, and a temptation for sedition took hold of us in which we were neither godly and pious [in our intentions] nor iniquitous and strong.” “God bless your father,” al-Ḥajjāj said. “You are right: neither have you been godly by rebelling against us nor have you become strong. Release the old man.”

Turning to al-Muṭarrif, al-Ḥajjāj asked him, “Do you admit you having become an infidel?” Al-Muṭarrif replied, “May God prosper the commander, whosoever rebels, sheds blood, renounces allegiance, departs from the community, and frightens the Muslims is indeed worthy of being called an infidel.” So al-Ḥajjāj set him free. Then he asked Saʿīd ibn Jubayr, “Do you admit you are an infidel?” Saʿīd replied, “I have never been an infidel since I first believed in God.” So al-Ḥajjāj struck off his head.

Then he examined the other captives, setting free those who admitted having been infidels and killing those who refused, until he came to an old man and a youth. He asked the latter, “Are you an infidel?” “Yes,” the young man answered. Al-Ḥajjāj commented, “But the old man does not accept [the label of] infidelity.” So the old man ventured, “Are you trying to dupe me, O Ḥajjāj? By God, if I know of anything much worse than infidelity, I will admit it.” Al-Ḥajjāj laughed and set him free.

When al-Ḥajjāj died and Sulaymān became caliph, al-Farazdaq said:

If al-Ḥajjāj was driven away by his tribe of Muʿattib,
That’s because they found a state ruled by their enemy.
The living ones among them had become humiliated
And their dead were in hellfire with faded moustaches.
They used to think misfortunes happened only to others,
But then misfortunes have turned upon them with suffering.
Send me to someone who was in China or was cast
To India by ships with great sails [and I will say to him]:
Come to Islam and justice in our land,
For insanity has died away from the people of Iraq.

Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik and ibn al-Riqāʿ

When Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik acceded to the caliphate, he wrote to his governor in al-Urdunn, “Tie the hands of ʿAdī ibn al-Riqāʿ to his neck and send him to me on a camel without a saddle, and let someone be responsible to prick him continually.” So he did, and when ʿAdī reached Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, he was thrown in front of him like a body without a soul. The caliph left him alone until his soul returned to him, then he said to him, “You deserve what you have endured. Are you not the one who said about al-Walid:

The Lord forbid that we live on, and lose him
And follow another shepherd after him.”

ʿAdī said, “No, by God, O Commander of the Faithful. That is not what I said. I rather said:

The Lord forbid that we live on, and lose them
And follow another shepherd after them.”

Sulaymān looked at him and laughed, then he ordered that he be given a gift and he let him go.

Sharik and al-Rabi‘ in front of al-Mahdi

Al-‘Utbi said, “There was some antagonism between Sharik, the judge, and al-Rabi‘, al-Mahdi’s chamberlain. Al-Rabi‘ used to incite al-Mahdi against him but the caliph did not pay attention to him. One night, al-Mahdi dreamt a dream in which he saw Sharik, the judge, turning his face away from him. When he woke up, he called al-Rabi‘ and related the dream to him. ‘Commander of the Faithful,’ al-Rabi‘ said, ‘Sharik is an opponent to you and he is a pure Fāṭimite.’ ‘Bring him to me,’ al-Mahdi ordered. When Sharik entered, the caliph said to him, ‘Sharik, I have heard you are a Fāṭimite.’ ‘Commander of the Faithful,’ Sharik said, ‘I pray to God that He guard you against being anything but a Fāṭimite – unless you mean Fāṭima bint Kisrā.’ ‘No,’ al-Mahdi said, ‘I mean Fāṭima bint Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace.’ ‘Do you curse her, O Commander of the Faithful?’ Sharik asked. ‘God forbid!’ the caliph said. ‘What do you say about someone who curses her?’ the judge asked. ‘May God’s curse be upon him,’ answered the caliph. Sharik said, ‘Then curse this man,’ – meaning al-Rabi‘ – ‘for he curses her, may God’s curse be upon him.’ Al-Rabi‘ protested, ‘No, by God, O Commander of the Faithful. I do not curse her.’ Sharik said to him, ‘You shameless man. Why then do you mention the Lady of the world’s ladies and the daughter of the Master of all messengers in men’s gatherings?’ Al-Mahdi interrupted, ‘Let’s not talk about this. I have seen you in a dream as though your face was turned away from me and your back was turned to me, and that was for nothing but your opposition to me. And I saw myself in the dream as though I was killing an atheist.’ Sharik said, ‘Your dream, Commander of the Faithful, is not the dream of the righteous Joseph, may God’s blessings be upon Muḥammad and him. Shedding blood does not become lawful by dreams, and the signs of atheism are clear.’ ‘And what are they?’ asked al-Mahdi. The judge replied, ‘Drinking wine, bribery in government, and a prostitute’s fee.’ ‘By God, you are right, Abū ‘Abd Allāh! By God, you are better than the one who incited me against you.’”

Sharik, the judge, entered the presence of al-Mahdi and al-Rabi‘ said to him, “You have treacherously stolen the money of God and the Commander of the Faithful.” Sharik retorted, “If that was so, you would have received your share.”

Al-Ḥajjāj and Jāmi‘ al-Muḥāribi

Al-‘Utbi said, “Jāmi‘ al-Muḥāribi entered the presence of al-Ḥajjāj. He was an old righteous man, an orator, a clever person, and one who was audacious in speaking frankly with the ruler. He was the one who said to al-Ḥajjāj when he

built the city of Wāsiṭ, ‘You have built it somewhere other than in your ancestral homeland and you will bequeath it to people other than your own children.’ Al-Ḥajjāj began to complain to Jāmi‘ about the disobedience of the Iraqi people and their bad ways. Jāmi‘ said, ‘If they loved you, they would have obeyed you. However, they do not hate you because of your lineage, nor do they hate you because of your ancestral homeland or your person as such. So abandon doing what distances them from you and do what brings them closer to you. Seek the goodwill of those below you, and you will be given it by those above you. Let your punishment come after your threat, and your threat after your promise.’ Al-Ḥajjāj responded, ‘I don’t think I can bring those sons of mean mothers to obeying me but by the sword.’ ‘O commander,’ Jāmi‘ advised, ‘if sword meets sword, the choice is lost.’ ‘The choice is then God’s,’ al-Ḥajjāj concluded. ‘Yes,’ Jāmi‘ said, ‘except that you will not know in whose favor God will make it.’ Al-Ḥajjāj was angry and said, ‘Man, you are indeed from the tribe of Muḥārib [Warrior].’ Jāmi‘ recited the following verse:

It is because of war we were called Muḥārib, and warriors
We were when spears became red as a result of stabbing.

“Al-Ḥajjāj said, ‘By God, I am about to wrench out your tongue and hit your face with it.’ Jāmi‘ said, ‘If we tell you the truth, we anger you; and if we deceive you, we anger God. But the commander’s anger is easier to bear than God’s.’ Al-Ḥajjāj said, ‘Yes,’ and he calmed down. When al-Ḥajjāj became occupied with some matter, Jāmi‘ sneaked out. He passed through the armed rows of people from Syria to the armed rows of people from Iraq; and there he saw an assemblage in which was a company from the Bakr tribe of Iraq, the Qays tribe of Iraq, the Tamīm tribe of Iraq, and the Azd tribe of Iraq. When they saw him, they eagerly craned their necks toward him and asked, ‘What news do you bring? May God protect you.’ He said, ‘Woe to you! Concentrate on deposing him as he concentrates on enmity to you. Leave off being enemies to one another, so long as he treats you as his enemies. When you are victorious over him, go back to your enmity to one another. O man from Tamīm, he is a greater enemy to you than a man from Azd; O man from Qays, he is a greater enemy to you than a man from Taghlib. And consider this: has he been triumphant over those of you who opposed him except by the help of those of you who remained with him?’ Jāmi‘ then fled immediately to Syria and sought protection from Zufar ibn al-Ḥārith, who granted him asylum.”

Al-Rashīd, Muslim ibn al-Walīd, and Ibn Abī Shaykh

Al-ʿUtbi said, “Al-Rashīd used to kill the descendants of Fāṭima and their followers [the Shīʿa]. Muslim ibn al-Walīd, the Victim of the Belles, was reported to him as siding with the Shīʿa; so he ordered that he be sought but Muslim fled from him. Then al-Rashīd ordered that Anas ibn Shaykh, the secretary of the

Barmakids, be sought but he fled from him too. Then he and Muslim ibn al-Walid were found with a songstress in Baghdad. When they were both brought, al-Rashid was told, 'Commander of the Faithful, the two men have been brought.' He asked, 'What two men?' He was told, 'Anas ibn Abi Shaykh and Muslim ibn al-Walid.' Al-Rashid said, 'Praise be to God who allowed me to seize them. Boy: bring them in.' When they came in, he looked at Muslim, who had turned pale, and he took pity on him and said, 'Well, Muslim! You are the one who said:

My passion is genial to 'Ali – and so is my heart—
And I see it has a distaste for the sons of 'Abbās.'

"Muslim said, 'O Commander of the Faithful, I am rather the one who said:

My passion is genial to the [Prophet's] cousins in my heart
And it is alienated from other feelings of geniality.
When virtues are perfect, you will be
Found most worthy of them, O sons of 'Abbās.'

"Hārūn [al-Rashid] was amazed at Muslim's quick wit, and one of those sitting with him said, 'Spare him, O Commander of the Faithful, for he is the most poetic of men. Test him and you will see wonders from him.' So the caliph said to him, 'Say something about Anas.' Muslim pleaded, 'Commander of the Faithful, allay my fear, may God allay your fear when you need that; for I have never been in the presence of a caliph.' Then he recited the following verses:

The sword was keenly eager for smacking Anas,
Death was observing and fate was waiting;
It could not obtain from him what it had hoped
Until fate would seek your opinion about him.
Sharper than death, [the caliph] pardons when he is powerful;
But death does not pardon when it gains power.

"Hārūn [al-Rashid] made Muslim sit behind him so that he would not see what he intended to do. After killing Anas, al-Rashid said to Muslim, 'Recite to me the most poetic of your verse.' And whenever Muslim finished reciting a poem, the caliph asked for more. Finally he said, 'Recite to me the poem in which you mention **mud**, for I remember I learned it when I was a boy.' So he recited the poem whose first verse is:

Pass on the wine to me, and don't drink before me;
And don't take revenge on the one who kills me.

"Then he came to the verse in which he says:

When it wets the forelock of a drinker among us,
It makes him walk like a fettered man walking in **mud**.

“Hārūn [al-Rashīd] laughed and said, ‘Woe to you, Muslim. You were not content with merely fettering him, but you made him also walk in mud!’ Then he ordered a gift for him and let him go.”

Chosroës and Yūshat, after al-Filhidh was killed

Chosroës said to Yūshat, the singer, after the latter had killed his own disciple al-Filhidh, “I used to find comfort by moving from you to him, and from him to you. But your envy and grudge have spoiled half of my enjoyment.” And he ordered that the singer be thrown under the paws of elephants. Yūshat pleaded, “If I have spoiled half of your enjoyment and you are now spoiling the other half, isn’t your crime against yourself similar to my crime against you?” Chosroës said, “Leave him alone. He is only inspired to say these words by the respite that has been given to him.”

Al-Rashīd and Ya‘qūb ibn Ṣālīḥ

Ya‘qūb ibn Ṣālīḥ ibn ‘Alī ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās said, “One day I entered the presence of al-Rashīd, the Commander of the Faithful, when he was furious and gloomy, and I regretted having entered, for I used to understand his facial expression of anger. I greeted him but he did not respond. I said, ‘A great misfortune!’ He gestured to me to have a seat, then turned to me and said, ‘God bless ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mu‘āwiya ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far ibn Abī Ṭālib, for he spoke wisely when he said:

O you who foolishly upbraid me for my temper,
I purposely disobey the one who upbraids and forbids me.
Refrain! For you are from a people whose roots are deep
In meanness; boast of them and take pride as you will.
Poetry adorns some mouths when they utter it
But it also renders some others miserably ugly.
A man may be given prosperity, not by virtue of his endeavor,
And another with endeavor and shrewdness may be precluded.
I wonder at some people with no noble origins
Who have become rich and who, even then, are not [my] like.
Whatever wealth or lack is my lot,
My response is none but “Praise be to God.””

“I said, ‘Commander of the Faithful, who is it that has achieved the capability of surpassing someone like you or being close?’ He said, ‘Perhaps he is one of the sons of your father and mother.’”

The mediation of Maslama between Hishām and al-Kumayt

Al-Kumayt ibn Zayd used to praise the Banū Hāshim and insinuate criticism of the Banū Umayya [in his poetry]. Hishām sought him but al-Kumayt eluded

him for twenty years, not settling for long anywhere because of his fear of Hishām. Maslama ibn ‘Abd al-Malik used to make a request of Hishām every day, which the latter never refused. When Maslama went out one day on one of his hunting trips, some people came to greet him and al-Kumayt ibn Zayd was among them, and he said, “O prince, peace be to you, the mercy of God, and His blessings. After this greeting:

Stop at the habitations like a visitor
And bide your time, you are not a lowly person.”

Then he reached his saying:

O Maslama ibn Abi al-Walīd, if you wish
You can resuscitate a dead man.
My ropes are attached to your ropes
Like nextdoor neighbors related by mutual protection.
I have now come to Umayya—
For matters must come to their ends.
And now I am on the right track
Like a man, guided, who was at a loss yesterday.

Maslama exclaimed, “Praise be to God! Who is this Indian old man who hails from other people, who begins with peace, then goes to greeting, and then poetry?” He was told, “This is al-Kumayt ibn Zayd.” Maslama admired him for his eloquence and rhetoric, so he asked him about his problem that had caused him long trouble. Al-Kumayt told him about the Commander of the Faithful’s anger with him, so Maslama assured him of safety and took him with him to see Hishām, who did not know him personally. Al-Kumayt said, “Peace be to you, Commander of the Faithful, and the mercy of God, and His blessings. Praise be to God ...” Hishām interrupted, “Indeed, praise be to God, my man.” Al-Kumayt continued, “... who began praise and created it, singled out Himself for praise, ordered His angels to offer it to Him, and made it the opening of His Book, the ultimate purpose of thanking Him, and the speech of the residents of His Paradise. I praise Him like one who has known with certainty and has seen with clarity. And I testify unto Him as He Himself has testified unto Himself in justice, alone with no partner; and I testify that Muḥammad is His Arab servant and illiterate Messenger. He sent him when human beings were in utter perplexity and darkness, when error was at its most pompous height, and he delivered the message from God as commanded and he advised His community and struggled in His path; and he worshiped His Lord until death came to him, may God bless him and grant him peace.

“Furthermore, O Commander of the Faithful, I have been lost in perplexity, and bewildered in a drunkenness whose danger blackened my life, whose call urged me, and to whose allure I responded. So I quickened my steps to error and wandered in darkness and ignorance; I was lured away from Truth and spoke

without sincerity. I am now in the position of someone who must take refuge, who speaks repentantly, and who sees guidance necessary after blindness. O Commander of the Faithful, how many a fallen man you have raised up, and how many a criminal you have pardoned!”

Hishām said to him, having ascertained that he was al-Kumayt, “Woe to you! Who is it that led you to error and called you to blindness?”

Al-Kumayt replied, “He is the one who expelled my father Adam from Paradise so that he forgot it and found no determination in himself. The Commander of the Faithful is like a wind of mercy that has aroused dispersed clouds, pieced them together until they intermeshed and became strong, and their thunder roared and their lightning flashed. Then they poured down on the earth, quenched its thirst, moistened it, turned it green, and irrigated it, and its thirsty people drank their fill. This is how we think of you, O Commander of the Faithful. May God illumine the intense pitch-darkness with you, and may He spare through you the blood of people whose hearts feel frightened by you, and who weep because they know your determination and insight, and recognize that you are war and the son of war, when eyes become red and helmets make incisions in the heads that wear them. May your strength remain mighty and your heart unflinching. May you remain fiery and full of cheer, restraining the enemies and knowledgeable about them, enticing horses to vicious war, dispensing with the opinions of intelligent men by having his own clever opinion and his appropriate forbearance. May God prolong the life of the Commander of the Faithful, give him full happiness, and drive back the enemies through him.”

Thereupon, Hishām became pleased with al-Kumayt and ordered that he be given a prize.

Deliverance of Ibn Hubayra from Khālīd al-Qasrī

Al-ʿUtbī said, “When Ibn Hubayra was brought to Khālīd ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Qasrī, governor of Iraq, he was fettered and shackled and was wearing a woolen tunic. When he arrived in front of Khālīd, he was thrown on the ground by the men. He said, ‘O commander, the people who have given you this blessing [of power] had likewise given it to those before you. I beseech you by God to follow a tradition in dealing with me by which those after you will deal with you.’ So Khālīd ordered that he be imprisoned. Ibn Hubayra ordered his servants to dig an underground tunnel for him which ended under his bed [in prison]. He escaped through it one night, when horses had been prepared for him which he rode by turns until he came to Maslama ibn ʿAbd al-Malik, whose protection he sought and was given. Maslama asked Hishām ibn ʿAbd al-Malik to accord Ibn Hubayra to him, so he did.

“When Khālīd ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Qasrī came to Hishām, he found Ibn Hubayra with him and exclaimed, ‘You have escaped a slave’s escape!’ Ibn Hubayra replied, ‘While you slept a bondmaid’s sleep!’ Al-Farazdaq said the following verses about that:

When you saw the exterior of the ground blocked,
 And no exit remained for you but its interior,
 You invoked the One whom Jonah invoked after he had
 Remained three nights in the dark, and he was given relief.
 You then walked underground in the night,
 Like no other night traveler had ever done in the darkness.
 You came out by no intercession bestowed on you as a favor,
 Save your urge to be close to the family of Aʿwaj.

“People went to Ibn Hubayra after Hishām had given him amnesty in order to congratulate him and praise his ideas, so he said to them in proverbial verse:

Whoever chances upon a good thing is praised by people
 And whoever commits an error is blamed for it without fail.

“Then he said to them, ‘What would you have thought of me if I had been intercepted [in my escape] or was overtaken and caught on my way?’

“A similar idea was expressed by al-Quṭāmi in the following verse:

People will tell someone who chances upon a good thing
 What he desires, but an erroneous man’s mother is bereaved.”

Maslama’s eunuch on Ibn Hubayra’s deliverance

ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sawwār said:

Al-Rabīʿ, the chamberlain, said to me, “Would you like to hear the story of Ibn Hubayra and Maslama?” I said, “Yes.” So he sent for a eunuch of Maslama who served him in his ritual ablutions and said to him, “Tell us the story of Ibn Hubayra and Maslama.” The eunuch said, “Maslama ibn ʿAbd al-Malik used to get up at night, do his ritual ablutions, and perform supererogatory prayers until morning, then go to see the Commander of the Faithful. While I was pouring water on his hands toward the end of one night as he did his ritual ablutions, someone shouted outside the portico, ‘I take refuge in God and in the prince.’ Maslama said, ‘This is Ibn Hubayra’s voice! Go out to him.’ So I went out to him, returned, and informed him. ‘Let him enter,’ he said. Ibn Hubayra entered, walking unsteadily because of lack of sleep. ‘I take refuge in God and in the prince,’ he said. Maslama replied, ‘I take refuge in God and you should take refuge in God.’ Ibn Hubayra said again, ‘I take refuge in God and in the prince.’ Maslama replied again, ‘I take refuge in God and you take refuge in God.’ Ibn Hubayra repeated the phrase until he had said it three times then said, ‘I take refuge in God.’ Maslama did not answer, then he said to me, ‘Take him and help him to do his ritual ablutions and let him pray. Ask him for the food he likes best and bring it to him; then give him a bed in that suite, the one facing the women’s apartments; and don’t awaken him until he wakes up when he does.’ So I took him, and he did his ritual ablutions and prayed. I asked him what food he would like and he said, ‘A drink of wheat mush with sugar and dates.’ After he drank

it, I prepared his bed and he slept. I returned to Maslama and informed him. In the morning Maslama went to Hishām and sat in his audience. When it was time for him to leave, he said, ‘Commander of the Faithful, I have a request.’ The caliph said, ‘Consider it done, unless it is with regard to Ibn Hubayra.’ Maslama said, ‘I agree, Commander of the Faithful.’ Then he rose to go but when he was about to leave the hall, he returned and said, ‘You have accustomed me to make an exception for one of my requests; and I would hate for people to say you have changed this exception for me.’ The caliph said, ‘I have not.’ Maslama said, ‘It is Ibn Hubayra.’ So the caliph pardoned him.”

The virtue of pardon and encouraging it

Al-Maʿmūn and his ablution servant

Al-Maʿmūn had a servant who helped him do his ritual ablutions. While the servant was pouring water on the caliph’s hands, the vessel fell from his hand and al-Maʿmūn became angry with the servant. “Commander of the Faithful,” the servant said, “God said, ‘... and those who suppress anger.’” [Q. 3:134] Al-Maʿmūn said, “I have suppressed my anger against you.” The servant said, “... and those who pardon fellowmen.” [Q. 3:134] Al-Maʿmūn said, “I have pardoned you.” The servant added, “... and God loves those who do good.” [Q. 3:134] Al-Maʿmūn said, “Go. You are a free man.”

Ibn Ḥaywa and ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz regarding a punished man

ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ordered that a man be punished. Rajāʾ ibn Ḥaywa said to him, “Commander of the Faithful, God has given you the victory you like, practice then the pardon He likes.”

ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAlī and ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ḥasan on killing the Banū Umayya

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, “ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAlī decided to kill the Banū Umayya living in Hejaz. ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ḥasan ibn Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with them, said to him, ‘If you are quickly disposed to kill your equals, to whom will you boast of your power? Forgive and God will forgive you.’”

Ibn Khuraym and al-Mahdī

Ibn Khuraym entered the presence of al-Mahdī, who had blamed some people of Syria and wanted to make them attack an army, and he said to him, “Commander of the Faithful, you must forgive offenses and pass over wrongdoers. To be obeyed by Arabs out of love is better for you than to be obeyed by them out of fear.”

Al-Mahdī and Ibn al-Sammāk on a man to be beheaded

Al-Mahdī ordered that a man be beheaded. Ibn al-Sammāk went to him and said, “This man should not be beheaded.” “Then what should be done to him?” asked the caliph. “Forgive him,” Ibn al-Sammāk replied, “If there is a recompense for that, it will be yours without me; and if there is a sin, it will be mine and not yours.” So the caliph set the man free.

Al-Shaʿbī and Ibn Hubayra regarding prisoners

Al-Shaʿbī interceded with Ibn Hubayra regarding a group of people he had imprisoned and said, “If you have imprisoned them wrongly, truth will make them free; and if you have imprisoned them rightfully, pardon will have room for them.”

Abū Sufyān and two feuding Quraysh tribes

Al-ʿUtbi said, “There was a homicide feud between two tribes of Quraysh. When Abū Sufyān arrived, everyone who was lowering his head raised it. “People of Quraysh,” Abū Sufyān said, “Do you want what is right or what is better than right?” They said, “And is there anything better than right?” He said, “Yes, forgiveness.” The people then concluded a truce and made peace.

Huzaym ibn Abī Ṭahma said to Yazīd ibn ʿĀtika after his victory over Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab, “No one was ever as unjust as you, and no one was ever as victorious as you; there is a third thing, shall I say it?” “What is it?” Ibn ʿĀtika asked. Huzaym said, “And no one was ever as forgiving as you.”

Abū Jaʿfar and Ibn Fuḍāla on a punished man

Al-Mubārak ibn Fuḍāla said, “I was with Abū Jaʿfar [al-Manṣūr] sitting at a meal when he ordered that a man be killed. I said, ‘Commander of the Faithful, God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “When the Day of Resurrection comes, someone will call out in front of God, ‘Hear ye, hear ye: whoever has done a good deed for God’s sake, let him come forward,’ and no one will come forward but the one who has forgiven an offender.” Thereupon, Abū Jaʿfar ordered that the man be released.’”

Al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays said, “The worthiest of men to be forgiven is the one who has the greatest capacity to punish.”

The Prophet, God bless him and grant him peace, said, “The closest to incurring God’s anger that a human being can be is when he is angry.”

And in their proverbs the Arabs have said: When you rule, be forbearing and forgiving. Be merciful, and mercy will be shown to you. As you judge others, you will be judged. Whoever does good one day, good will be done unto him.

High aspiration and nobility of heart

Nāfiʿ ibn Jubayr ibn Muṭʿim entered the presence of al-Walid wearing a coarse robe and rough sandals. He greeted him and sat down. Al-Walid did not recognize him and said to a servant at hand, “Ask this old man who he is.” So the servant asked him and Nāfiʿ replied, “Keep away!” The servant returned to al-Walid and informed him of what had happened, and al-Walid said, “Go back to him and ask him again.” The servant did and Nāfiʿ answered him as he did before. Al-Walid laughed, then he himself asked him, “Who are you?” “Nāfiʿ ibn Jubayr ibn Muṭʿim,” he now answered.

Ziyād ibn Ḥabīb asked his son ʿUbayd Allāh, “Shall I commend you to Prince Ziyād?” His son said, “Father, if a living man has nothing but the commendation of a dead man, that living man is dead.”

Muʿāwiya asked ʿAmr ibn Saʿīd, “To whom did your father commend you?” ʿAmr replied, “My father commended others to me and did not commend me to anyone.” “And what counsel did he give you?” Muʿāwiya asked. “[He counseled] that his brethren should miss nothing of him [when he dies] but his face,” ʿAmr replied.

Mālīk ibn Mismaʿ said to ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ziyād ibn Ḥabīb, “There is no arrow in my quiver that I can trust more than I can trust you.” ʿUbayd said, “I am indeed in your quiver. But, by God, if I am standing up in it, I will stretch it out; and if I am sitting down in it, I will rip it.” Mālīk remarked, “May God increase the likes of you in the clan.” ʿUbayd retorted, “You have asked God something excessive!”

Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab said, “I have never found a man with a nobler soul than al-Farazdaq: he lampooned me when I was a king, and praised me when I was a commoner.”

ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ziyād ibn Ḥabīb came to ʿAttāb ibn Warqāʾ al-Riyāḥī, while he was governor of Khurāsān, and the latter gave him twenty thousand [dirhams]. ʿUbayd Allāh said to him, “By God, you have not done a good deed [selflessly] so that I must praise you, nor have you done a bad deed so that I must blame you; but you are the closest of the far ones, and the most loved of the hated ones.”

This ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ziyād ibn Ḥabīb is the one who said, “By God, I have never regretted anything as much as when I brought the head of Muṣʿab ibn al-Zubayr to ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān and he prostrated himself to God; for I should have struck off his head [then and there] and be the one who would have killed two kings of the Arabs in one day.”

Of Ibn ʿUllafa’s aspirations

ʿAqīl ibn ʿUllafa al-Murri was one of the men with the noblest aspirations. He was a bedouin who lived in the desert and caliphs used to seek to become related to him by marriage [as in-laws]. [Caliph] ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān

asked the hand of ‘Aqīl’s daughter for one of his own sons, but the bedouin said to him, “Spare me your children of non-Arab mothers.”

‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and ‘Aqīl ibn ‘Ullafa

‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz said to a man from the Banū Umayya, who had maternal uncles in the tribe of Murra, “May God make ugly the resemblance prevailing on you from the tribe of Murra!” This saying reached ‘Aqīl ibn ‘Ullafa [al-Murri], so he came to him and said without beginning his speech with a greeting of peace, “Commander of the Faithful, it reached me that you were angry with a man from your paternal uncle’s sons who had maternal uncles in the tribe of Murra, and that you said to him, ‘May God make ugly the resemblance prevailing on you from the tribe of Murra!’ And I say, ‘May God make ugly the meaner of the two sides.’”

‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz said, “Who has seen a more astonishing person than this old man, who came all the way from the desert with no object in mind but to revile us, then he went away?” A man from the tribe of Murra said, “By God, O Commander of the Faithful, he did not revile you; he only reviled himself. By God, we are the meaner of the two sides.”

Of ‘Aqīl’s jealousy

Abū Ḥātim al-Sijistānī said on the authority of Muḥammad ibn al-‘Utbi ibn ‘Abd Allāh, “I heard my father relating what he had heard from Abū ‘Amr al-Murri who said, ‘The sons of ‘Aqīl ibn ‘Ullafa ibn Murra ibn Ghaṭafān are nomads, wandering from place to place seeking rain [and grazing grounds]. ‘Aqīl ibn ‘Ullafa heard a daughter of his laughing one day and having a fit of choking at the end of her laugh. He unsheathed his sword and attacked her, saying:

Being fainthearted, I was afraid
Of a laugh that ended in a fit of choking.

“‘Aqīl also said:

Even if a dowry were offered to me consisting of
A thousand camels, slaves, and ten she-camels,
The most preferable in-law to me would be the grave.’”

Al-Aṣma‘ī said, “‘Aqīl ibn ‘Ullafa al-Murri was a man jealous of his reputation and caliphs were related to him by marriage [as in-laws]. When he went out one day on a commercial trip, he took his daughter suffering from mange with him. They camped at one of Syria’s monasteries called Sa‘d’s monastery. When they left, ‘Aqīl said:

[Our camels] had enough of Sa‘d’s monastery
And often shook their skulls at it disdainfully.

“Then he said to his son, ‘O ‘Amallas, continue.’ And his son continued, creating the following verse:

Morning dawned on them in the desert, carrying young men
With tilted turbans as if they were intoxicated by night travel.

“Then he said to his daughter, ‘O mangy one, continue.’ And she said:

As if sleeplessness had given them Şarkhad’s wine to drink,
A wine that crept into their mounts, down to their legs.

“‘Aqīl fumed at her, ‘And what would make you know the effects of wine?’ Unsheathing his sword, he hurled himself at her; but she sought the help of her brother ‘Amallas, who intervened between him and her. Then ‘Aqīl tried to hit him with the sword but ‘Amallas shot him with an arrow that pierced both of his thighs. ‘Aqīl fell on his knees, and they went away and abandoned him. When they reached the nearest water spring of Arabian bedouins, they said to them, ‘We abandoned a slaughter she-camel behind us. Get to her before she dies, and take water with you.’ Lo and behold, they found ‘Aqīl on his knees, saying:

My sons have clothed me in blood,
A *shanshana* [of theirs] I have known from *Akhzam*.
Whoever fights with heroic men will be wounded.

“*Shanshana* means: a natural quality; *Akhzam* is: a well-known stallion; this verse is an Arab proverb.”

Al-Aws and al-Khazraj

Al-Anşār were among the most high-spirited and honorable people, and they were descendants of al-Aws and al-Khazraj, the sons of Qayla. They never paid tribute to any king in the Jāhiliyya. [King] Tubba‘ wrote to them, calling upon them to obey him and threatening them if they did not. They wrote back to him saying:

How eagerly the slave, Tubba‘, yearns to fight us!
Yet his place is ever a home of ignominy.
We are a people in whose land no [enemy] dares sleep.
May the Messenger bite the clitoris of the sender’s mother.

So Tubba‘ Abū Karib attacked them, and they used to fight him by day and send him a guest’s meal by night. He finally got weary of fighting them and left.

Al-Farazdaq entered the presence of Sulaymān ibn ‘Abd al-Malik and the latter frowned on him as though he did not know him and asked, “Who are you?” “Don’t you know me, O Commander of the Faithful?” al-Farazdaq asked. “No,” the caliph replied. Al-Farazdaq said, “I am of a people, among whom is the most faithful of the Arabs, the most commanding of the Arabs, the most

generous of the Arabs, the most clement of the Arabs, the most chivalrous of the Arabs, and the most poetic of the Arabs.” Sulaymān said, “By God, you shall clarify what you have said, or else I will make your back hurt [with lashes] and will destroy your house.” “Yes, Commander of the Faithful,” al-Farazdaq said. “As for the most faithful of the Arabs, he is Ḥājib ibn Zurāra who pawned his bow with all the Arabs and faithfully redeemed it. As for the most commanding of the Arabs, he is Qays ibn ‘Āṣim who came to God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, and the Messenger spread out his own mantle under his feet, saying, ‘This is the chieftain of all tent-dwellers.’ As for the most clement of the Arabs, he is ‘Attāb ibn Warqā’ al-Riyāḥī. As for the most chivalrous of the Arabs, he is al-Ḥarīsh ibn Hilāl al-Sa’dī. And as for the most poetic of the Arabs, it is I myself before you, O Commander of the Faithful.”

Sulaymān was distressed at what he heard from al-Farazdaq’s boasting, which he could not deny, and he said to him, “Go back to where you came from. We have nothing good for you here.” So al-Farazdaq left and said:

We came to you, not out of a need for you that occurred to us,
Nor did we come because of some lack in the tribe of Mujāshī’.

Al-Farazdaq also said, boasting:

The Banū Dārim, my people, wear thin sandals [like kings]
And have immaculate reputations.
They drag fringed Yemenite robes as though they were
Swords polished free of rust.

The most boastful verses that the Arabs have said were the following ones of al-Aḥwaṣ:

Every unfortunate calamity that befalls me
Honors me and raises my life’s circumstance.
And if you seek noble men, you will find me
Like the sun, visible in every place.

‘Āmir ibn Uḥaymir and the two mantles of Muḥarriq

Abū ‘Ubayda said, “The deputations of the Arabs met at al-Nu‘mān ibn al-Mundhir’s quarters, and he brought out to them the two mantles of Muḥarriq, saying, ‘Let the man from the most powerful Arab tribe rise and wear them.’ ‘Āmir ibn Uḥaymir al-Sa’dī rose and put on one mantle as a loincloth and wore the other. Al-Nu‘mān asked him, ‘What makes you the most powerful of the Arabs?’ ‘Āmir replied, ‘The might and number of the Arabs in the tribe of Ma‘add, then in Nizār, Tamīm, Sa’d, Ka‘b, ‘Awf, and Bahdala. Whoever among the Arabs refuses to acknowledge this, let him contradict me.’ But everyone kept silent.

“Then al-Nu‘mān said, ‘This is your status among your people. But what is it in your own self and among the people of your own household?’ ‘Āmir said,

'I am father of ten, maternal uncle of ten, and paternal uncle of ten. As for my status in my own self, this is my proof.' He put down his foot on [a point in] the ground and said, 'Whoever removes my foot from its place will be given one hundred camels.' But no one stood up to him, and so he took possession of the two mantles. Al-Farazdaq said the following verses about him:

There is no boy in the tribe of Sa'd or the family of Malik
 Who, when asked, will not feel insulted.
 To them al-Nu'mān granted the two mantles of Muḥarriq
 On account of Ma'add's glory and their collected multitudes."

The house of Sa'd Manāt and Aws's verse on them

The members of this house of Sa'd ibn Zayd Manāt had the duty of *ifāḍa* [leading pilgrims from 'Arafa to Minā] in the Jāhiliyya. Among them were the Banū Ṣafwān, about whom Aws ibn Maghrā' al-Sa'dī says:

They don't move from their stand on 'Arafa
 Until told, "Give permission, family of Ṣafwān."
 The sun only rises at the move of our forward man
 And it does not set until our rear man has moved.

Al-Farazdaq has a similar idea when he says:

You see people walk behind us when we walk,
 And they stop when we gesture to them to stop.

Hunayda and vainglory

Hunayda bint Ṣaṣa'a, al-Farazdaq's aunt, used to say, "I will give twenty camels to any woman of the Arabs who can bring forth four men like my four in front of whom it is permitted to remove the veil: my father Ṣaṣa'a, my brother Ghālib, my maternal uncle al-Aqrā' ibn Ḥābis, and my husband al-Zibriqān ibn Badr." So she was called "the Woman of the Veil".

Among those who had nobility of heart and high aspiration was Ṭāhir ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Khurāsānī. When he killed Muḥammad ibn Zubayda and was afraid that [Caliph] al-Ma'mūn would double-cross him, he kept aloof from him in Khurāsān and did not publicly announce the latter's deposition.

Di'bil ibn 'Alī al-Khuzā'i said, taking pride in the killing of Muḥammad by Ṭāhir ibn al-Ḥusayn because he was a client of Khuzā'a or, it was said, he was born a Khuzā'i:

How can al-Ma'mūn unjustly attribute weakness to me?
 Did he not see Muḥammad's head yesterday?
 He towered above the heads of human beings
 As mountains tower above the peaks of hills.
 I am from a people who are ever who they are,

They killed your brother and honored you with a seat.
 They raised your position after it had languished in obscurity
 And they saved you from remaining in the lowest of grounds.

Ṭāhir ibn al-Ḥusayn said:

I was angry with the world and let others plunder its contents,
 And I satisfied it by one way of putting myself in danger.
 I killed the Commander of the Faithful, yet
 I remained a torment for those succeeding him.
 I came to live in a mansion, as you see,
 As if I were one of the party kings in it.
 In my head, there still remains an assailing whim
 That may lead either to a sensible act or a contrary opinion.

Muḥammad ibn Yazīd ibn Maslama answered him:

You blamed the world, may you never rest easy, and
 May it accept nothing in response but risking life and limb.
 Who are you or what are you, O mushroom of a plateau,
 When you will not cling to someone of us who will protect you?
 We spilled our blood with our own hands,
 Like a swarm of bees, giving death to one another in battle.
 You will know what evil your hands inflict upon you
 And what they have inflicted. Don't boast of killing caliphs.
 In your head, there still remains an assailing whim
 And we will extract it with bloody, fire-tempered spears.

ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir said:

He who constantly overlooks [flaws] is befriended
 And he who constantly blames is annoyingly boring.
 He who owes good deeds to others cannot rest
 And he who performs them meets with procrastination.
 A double-faced man is suspected
 On whatever side he places his passion.
 Desist from what you aspire to, [woman,]
 For my free time is occupied away from you.
 Ask her who asks about me,
 For someone asked may respond with something good.
 I am a man whose genealogy is well known,
 My ancestors are noble chieftains.
 Ask, and their readiness to help will tell you
 They are [as good as] swords with polished blades.
 Every sword [of theirs] is quenched with blood
 And their swords' cutting edges are blunted.
 Muṣ'ab is my grandfather, leader of the Banū
 Hāshim, leadership to him being a matter of course.

Ḥusayn, after him, is the head of their cause,
 For truth is rightly accepted.
 My father is someone who has no equal.
 Who can vie for superiority with him, tell me?
 He has a sound opinion, and it has led to
 Good results for his people.
 Among them, he was placed at the peak of honor,
 And he was surrounded by dignity and respect.
 Reports clearly speak out about him,
 If an unknown ignoramus tries to silence them.
 Ask the giant strongman about the day
 When groups of horses surrounded him
 And, above his head, his hand rose
 Brandishing a polished, sharp sword
 That sank into the belly of the crazy man
 Around whom were garrulous fellows.
 And he fell to the ground, the soil being his death place,
 And his kingdom was taken away from him by a demon.
 Toward his Babylon, he led an army
 That was larger than breadth and length themselves.
 [His soldiers] gave up themselves to God,
 They were neither unarmed nor cowardly.
 He is a king whose power prevails
 And whose generosity is ever expended.
 His amulets have been taken away from him,
 And he is feared and yet hoped for.
 His revenge is sought only by himself
 And the blood he sheds remains unavenged.

Muḥammad ibn Yazīd ibn Maslama, who was one of his friends and the most favored with him, responded to him [in verse]; then he apologized to him and claimed that he had not been motivated by anything to respond to him except his saying:

Who can vie for superiority with him, tell me?

Whereupon ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir ordered that Muḥammad ibn Yazīd be given one hundred thousand [dirhams], and he made him more favored and of higher position:

[My woman,] do not fear the gossip about me.
 All that you have heard is misleading.
 No love that I know I have for you
 Has any relation to the love of anyone else.
 Will a trustworthy man betray the promise?
 A lovesick man never betrays a promise.
 You have burdened me with all kinds of reproaches;

All that you have burdened me with is tolerated.
 Judge as you wish and seek adjudication;
 What is forbidden to me is permitted to you.
 How can I have a substitute for you?
 No substitute for you is acceptable.
 Why is my home desolate without you
 When my conscience is inhabited by you?
 On the day of farewell, a young woman appeared
 To us like an evidently beautiful lady, like the sun.
 She tried to tighten her cloak
 And her belt was untied.
 Our union was then firmly knit
 And our separation had tied wings.
 Then she turned to say goodbye to us
 And her kohl was washed away by tears.
 O you, whose intention is clear,
 Your errors will not be counted.
 You have reached one interpretation
 But, unfortunately, we have another.
 The one who guided you on that day
 Will indeed stray on the day of death.
 The killer of the crazy man will be killed
 And the blood of his killer will be unavenged.
 The spear maker may be betrayed by his own spear
 And yet the spearhead is polished.
 And the seeker of revenge will achieve his end
 Even after the bereaved have been consoled.
 O brother of the crazy man, you have achieved something
 Although you did not have power to do anything.
 With his largesse that has not been gratefully recognized
 Groups of horses have freely wandered.
 And through a shepherd with no compassion,
 All these deeds have been done.
 O son of the fire temple, the one who kindles it
 Has no trousers on the flesh of his thighs.
 Who is Ḥusayn, who is his father?
 And who is Muṣʿab? They were all killed.
 The best saying is that which is truest
 When sayings are heatedly opposed to one another.

Correspondence of kings

Al-ʿUtbi said on the authority of his father, “The king of Yemen gave ten sacrificial animals as a gift to Mecca and ordered that they be slaughtered by the most powerful man of Quraysh. Hind bint ʿUtba approached Abū Sufyān, her bridegroom, and said, ‘Don’t be preoccupied by women lest you miss out on

this noble deed, my man.’ He replied, ‘Leave your husband to choose for himself, my woman. By God, if anyone other than me slaughters them, I will slaughter him.’ The animals remained tied to their tethers until Abū Sufyān went out on the seventh day and slaughtered them.”

Between Caesar and Mu‘āwiya

Zuhayr said on the authority of Abū al-Juwayriyya al-Jarmī, “Caesar wrote to Mu‘āwiya, ‘Tell me about some thing that has no prayer niche; and about someone who has no father, someone who has no clan, and someone whose tomb moves along with him; and tell me about three things that were not created in a womb; and about one thing, about one half-thing, and about no-thing; and in this bottle send me the seeds of everything.’ So Mu‘āwiya sent the letter and the bottle to Ibn ‘Abbās and the latter wrote back, saying, ‘As for the thing that has no prayer niche, it is the Ka‘ba; as for the one who has no father, it is Jesus; as for the one who has no clan, it is Adam; and as for the one whose tomb moves along with him, it is Jonah. As for the three things that were not created in a womb, they are Abraham’s ram, Thamūd’s she-camel, and Moses’ serpent. As for the one thing, it is a man who has a mind by which he works; as for the half-thing, it is a man who has no mind and works by the opinion of those who have one; and as for the no-thing, it is he who has no mind to work by and does not seek the help of the another man’s mind.’ Then Ibn ‘Abbās filled the bottle with water, saying, ‘This is the seed of everything.’ He sent all this to Mu‘āwiya, and the latter sent it to Caesar. When the letter and the bottle reached Caesar, he said, ‘This could only come out from the people of a house of prophecy.’”

From the king of India to ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz

Nu‘aym ibn Ḥammād said, “The king of India sent a letter to ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz, in which he said, ‘From the king of kings who is the son of a thousand kings and is married to the daughter of a thousand kings, in whose stables are a thousand elephants, who has two rivers that grow aloe-wood, aloes, coconuts, and camphor, whose scent is perceptible at a distance of twelve miles – to the king of the Arabs who does not attribute partners to God. After this exordium, I am sending you a *gift* that is not a gift but a greeting. I would like you to send me a man who would teach me Islam and explain it to me. And peace be to you.’ By *gift*, he meant the letter.”

Between the king of the Byzantines and al-Walīd regarding the destruction of the church of Damascus

Al-Riyāshī said, “When al-Walīd destroyed the church of Damascus, the king of the Byzantines wrote to him, ‘You destroyed the church that your father had spared. If his sparing it was right, your father was wrong [in your opinion]; if his

sparing it was wrong, what is your excuse [for destroying it]?’ Al-Walid wrote back to him, ‘And [remember] David and Solomon, when they gave judgment about the crop in which the people’s sheep had strayed and We bore witness to their judgment, and We made Solomon understand it, and to each of them We gave judgment and knowledge.’” [Q. 21:78]

The king of the Byzantines wrote to ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān, “I ate meat from the camel which your father had ridden, on escaping from Medina. I will send one hundred thousand and one hundred thousand soldiers in a raid against you.” ‘Abd al-Malik wrote to al-Ḥajjāj, asking him to send someone to ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Ḥasan with a threat ordering him to compose an answer [to the king], and he asked al-Ḥajjāj to write back to him what ‘Abd Allāh would write, so he did. ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Ḥasan said, “God, may He be exalted, has a Preserved Tablet at which He casts three hundred glances daily, in each single one of which He causes someone to live, to die, to rise to power, or to be humiliated; and He does what He wills. I verily hope He will cast one of these glances at you, and it will be sufficient for me to save me from you.” So al-Ḥajjāj wrote this to ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān, and the latter wrote it to the king of the Byzantines. When the king read it, he said, “This could only come out of the language of prophecy.”

The king of India sent Hārūn al-Rashīd Qal‘ī swords, Suyūrī dogs, and Indian clothes. When the messengers brought him the gifts, he ordered his Turkish guards to stand in two parallel lines, wearing armor that covered their bodies so that nothing but their eyes could be seen. He then permitted the messengers to enter and he said to them, “What have you brought?” They said, “These are the most honorable clothes in our country.” Hārūn ordered his cutter to cut them into many coverings and blinders for his horses. The messengers made the sign of the cross on their faces in consternation and lowered their heads. Then the chamberlain asked, “What else do you have?” They said, “These are Qal‘ī swords that are matchless.” Hārūn asked that the Ṣamsāma, ‘Amr ibn Ma‘dīkarīb’s sword, be brought; and with it all the [Qal‘ī] swords were cut, one by one, as radishes would be cut, and its blade did not bend; then he showed them its sharp edge, and there was no dent in it. The messengers made the sign of the cross on their faces. “What else do you have?” he asked, and they said, “These are Suyūrī dogs that no predatory animal encounters without being wounded.” “I have a predatory animal,” Hārūn said, “and if they wound it, they will be what you have said of them.” Then he ordered that the lion be brought to them and released from its cage. When they saw it, it terrified them and they said, “We don’t have such a predatory animal in our country.” Hārūn commented, “These are the predatory animals of our country.” They said, “Then we have to release the dogs against it.” The dogs were three, and they were released against the lion and tore it up. Hārūn admired the dogs and said, “Ask for whatever you wish from among the curiosities of our country for these dogs.” They said, “We only wish to have the sword with which our

swords were cut.” Hārūn replied, “We would not wish to be miserly to you; but it is not permitted in our religion to give you weapons in exchange for gifts. If it were not for this, we would not withhold it from you. But do wish for whatever else you like.” “We wish nothing but that,” they insisted. Hārūn said, “This is impossible.” Then he ordered that they be given many presents and he rewarded them generously.

Between al-Maʿmūn and Ṭāhir ibn al-Ḥusayn

Abū Jaʿfar al-Baghdādī said, “When Ṭāhir ibn al-Ḥusayn shut himself off from al-Maʿmūn in Khurāsān and was on his guard against him, al-Maʿmūn sent him an attendant whom he had educated well, taught all kinds of knowledge, and offered as a gift together with many dainty curiosities of Iraq. He had colluded with the attendant to poison Ṭāhir, had given him a deadly poison to use, and had promised him a lot of money for doing that. When the attendant reached Khurāsān and made the gift get to Ṭāhir, the latter accepted it and ordered that the attendant be put up in a house; he generously bestowed upon him all that he needed and left him there for several months. When the attendant had become bored with his situation, he wrote to Ṭāhir, ‘Sir, if you accept me, then do so; otherwise, return me to the Commander of the Faithful.’ Ṭāhir sent for him and brought him in; but when the attendant reached the door of the council room in which Ṭāhir was, he was ordered to halt there. Ṭāhir was sitting on a white felt cushion and had shaved his head clean; in front of him was an open copy of the Qurʾān and an unsheathed sword. He said to the attendant, ‘We have accepted what the Commander of the Faithful sent, but not you. We do not accept you and we are returning you to the Commander of the Faithful. I have no answer to write to him but my own condition that you see. Convey to the Commander of the Faithful my greetings and tell him about the condition you have seen me in.’ When the attendant came to al-Maʿmūn and told him the story and described the condition in which he had seen Ṭāhir, al-Maʿmūn consulted his ministers in this regard and asked them what it meant, but no one of them knew. Al-Maʿmūn said, ‘I have come to understand its meaning: as for his shaving his head clean and sitting on a white felt cushion, he is telling us that he is a humble servant; as for the open copy of the Qurʾān, he is reminding us of the compacts that we have made with him; as for the unsheathed sword, he is saying that if those compacts are broken, the sword will decide between us and him. Don’t mention him to us anymore and don’t stir up the condition in which he is.’ Al-Maʿmūn did not disturb him until Ṭāhir ibn al-Ḥusayn died and ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir ibn al-Ḥusayn took his place, and he turned out to be the most pleasant of men toward al-Maʿmūn.

“Ṭāhir ibn al-Ḥusayn wrote to al-Maʿmūn regarding the release from prison of Ibn al-Sindī, who had been al-Maʿmūn’s governor of Egypt whom he had deposed and jailed. Al-Maʿmūn released him and wrote back to Ṭāhir:

You are my brother and my friend;
What you accept, I accept too.
Whatever situation you like,
I like it too.
I give you my word on that, by God;
By God I do, by God I do.”

THE BOOK OF THE RUBY ON LEARNING AND GOOD MANNERS

Introduction to the Book of the Ruby on learning and good manners

Abū ‘Umar Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Rabbih said:

We have spoken about addressing kings and how men acted in their presence by using different kinds of wonderful maxims and ingratiating themselves with them by subtle means, delicate ideas, clever speech, and a variety of other methods. With God’s commendation and guidance, we will now speak about learning and good manners; for these are the two poles around which revolve matters of religion and the world, and the distinction between human beings and other animals, and between angelic nature and beastly nature. Learning and good manners are the fundamental constituents of the mind, the lamp of the body, the light of the heart, and the support of the soul. By His kind power and great authority, God has made some things dependent on others and generated by them. Letting one’s imagination wander about things that are perceived by the senses arouses notions of memory, and these awaken the deliberation of thought which, in turn, stirs up the latent will; and the will perfects the means of action. Everything existing in the mind and appearing in the imagination is memory; then it becomes thought, then will, and then action. And the mind is receptive to learning and does not do anything without it.

Learning is of two kinds: a learning which is retained inside oneself and a learning which is used. The one retained is harmful but the one used is beneficial. The proof that the mind is only active when it receives things to learn, such as when sight receives colors and when hearing receives sounds, is that a rational person who is not taught anything is like someone who has no mind. If a little child is not taught good manners and is not instructed by means of a book, he remains as doltish as beasts and as aberrant as animals. If someone contends that we may find a rational person of little learning who, using his mind despite his little learning, is of sounder opinion, greater perspicacity, and better resourcefulness than another person of vast learning but of little intellect, our argument against him is what we have mentioned earlier regarding retained learning and used learning. For a person of little learning who uses his mind is better than a person of vast learning who retains it in his heart.

Al-Muhallab was asked, “How have you achieved what you have achieved?” “By learning,” he answered. “But others have greater learning than you,” he was told, “yet they have not achieved what you have achieved.” He said, “Theirs is a learning that was retained, and mine a learning that was used.”

Wise men have said, "Learning is a [caravan] leader, the mind is a [camel] driver, and the self is a group of camels. If the camels have a leader but no driver, they will perish; if they have a driver but no leader, they will go right and left; but if they have both, the camels will respond, either willingly or by compulsion."

Kinds of learning

While he was in the presence of al-Ma'mūn, Sahl ibn Hārūn said, "There are some kinds of learning that Muslims ought not to look into; one may have a distaste for some science just as one may have a distaste for some legally permitted thing."

Al-Ma'mūn said, "Some people may call a thing learning when it is not; if this is what you intended, its meaning is then what I have mentioned. If you had said also that the depth of learning cannot be grasped, its bottom cannot be fathomed, its principles cannot be fully penetrated, and its parts cannot be controlled, you would be right. If this is so, you should then begin with the most important thing then go to the less important, with the most certain thing then the less certain, with what is obligatory then with what is supererogatory; that will be a purposeful justice and a beautiful method. A wise man said, 'I do not seek learning in the hope of reaching its goal and understanding its end, but rather in search for what one cannot afford to ignore.' This is the meaning of what I have said. Others said, 'The learning necessary for kings is genealogy and history, that necessary for managers of war is the study of battles and biographies, and that necessary for merchants is writing and arithmetic. But to call something learning and forbid it without asking whether some of it may be useful is not right.'"

Muḥammad ibn Idrīs, may God be pleased with him, said, "Learning is of two kinds: the science of bodies and the science of religions."

ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muslim ibn Qutayba said, "Whoever wants to be learned, let him study one kind of learning; and whoever wants to be a man of letters, let him study many kinds of learning."

Abū Yūsuf, the judge, said, "Three persons are not safe from three things: the one who seeks religion through philosophy is not safe from heresy, the one who seeks wealth through alchemy is not safe from poverty, and the one who seeks rare *ḥadīths* is not safe from falsehood."

Ibn Sirīn, may God have mercy on him, said, "Learning is larger than can be grasped comprehensively; so take from every thing what is best."

Ibn ʿAbbās, may God be pleased with both [him and his father], said, "Sufficient for you in religious sciences is to know of them what you cannot afford to ignore; and sufficient for you in literary sciences is to cite from them examples and proverbs."

A poet said:

There is no writer whose writing
Will not survive, although his hands may perish.
So don't write anything with your hand
But what will please you to see upon resurrection.

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, "I have arrived [at fame] by relating anecdotes and I have achieved [renown] by telling strange stories."

It was said, "He who speaks overmuch about grammar will make it appear stupid, and he who recites poetry overmuch will make it sound trite, and he who goes deep into jurisprudence will be honored."

Abū Nuwās al-Ḥasan ibn Hānī said:

I have many wonderful stories for you;
If I relate them to you, they will please you.
They are refined and best among narrators' selections,
Like pearls strung in a round necklace on a chest.
I diligently seek scholars, writing down what they say,
So that I may relate it to whomever I meet and make him laugh.

Urging others to seek learning

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, "Man continues to be learned so long as he seeks learning; when he thinks he has learned [everything], he becomes ignorant."

He also said, blessings and peace be upon him, "People consist of learned and learners; the rest are barbarians."

He also said, may God bless him and grant him peace, "Angels lower their wings to the seeker of learning because they are pleased with what he seeks. The ink running down the pens of scholars is indeed better than the blood of martyrs dying for the cause of God."

David said to his son Solomon, on both be peace, "Wrap learning around your neck and write it on the tablets of your heart."

He also said, "Let learning be your wealth and good manners your embellishment."

ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, said, "The worth of every man lies in what he does well."

Abū ʿAmr ibn al-ʿAlāʾ was asked, "Is it good for an old man to study and learn?" He replied, "If it is good for him to live, it is good for him to study and learn."

ʿUrwa ibn al-Zubayr, may God have mercy on him, said to his sons, "Seek learning, my sons. For if you are the young among a people and are not needed now, you may become the elders of some other people for whom you will become indispensable."

The king of India said to his sons, and he had forty, "My sons: keep reading books for a long time and let your learning increase every day by one letter. For

there are three persons who will not feel lonely in a strange land: a learned legist, a brave hero, and a well-spoken man with many ideas.”

Al-Muhallab said to his sons, “Beware of sitting in the market with anyone unless it is with a maker of coats of mail or a bookseller.” He meant they would benefit in war from the maker of coats of mail and gain learning from the bookseller.

A poet said:

A book is a wonderful companion when you are alone.
You'll enjoy reading it, if loved ones betray you.
It does not divulge your secret, if you entrust one to it;
Wisdom and truth are furthermore derived from it.

Another said:

Every seeker of pleasure has his own recreation,
And a scholar's most pleasant recreation is in his books.

A man passed by ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Umar sitting in a cemetery with a book in his hand. “What made you sit here?” he asked, and ‘Abd Allāh replied, “There is no better preacher than a tomb and there is no more enjoyable companion than a book.”

Ru’ba ibn al-‘Ajjāj said, “The genealogist al-Bakrī said to me, ‘Ru’ba, perhaps you belong to a group of people who, if I said nothing about them, would not ask me anything, and if I did speak to them, would not understand me.’ I said to him, ‘I really hope not.’ He said, ‘What is the bane of learning, its misfortune, and its fault?’ I said, ‘You tell me!’ He said, ‘Its bane is forgetfulness, its misfortune is telling lies, and its fault is spreading it among those who don’t appreciate it.’”

‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās, may God be pleased with both of them, said, “There are two greedy persons who never have enough: a seeker of learning and a seeker of this world.”

He also said, “I humbled myself as a seeker and so I was dignified as someone sought.”

A man said to Abū Hurayra, “I would like to seek learning but I am afraid I would lose it.” He said, “To abandon the seeking of learning is enough loss of it for you.”

‘Abd Allāh ibn Mas‘ūd said, “A man is not born a scholar; he rather becomes one by learning.”

A poet borrowed this idea and said:

Learn, because a man is not born a scholar;
And a learned man is not like one who is ignorant.

Another poet said:

Learn, because a man is not created a scholar;
And he who knows something is not like him who does not.

Another poet said:

I haven't seen a branch that does not grow from its root,
And I haven't seen learning begin by other than the act of learning.

And another poet said:

Learning revives the hearts of the dead
As rain revives a country when it touches it.
Learning removes blindness from its owner's heart
As the moon removes the blackness from the dark.

A wise man said, "Of the kinds of learning, seek the one that is most desired by your soul and lightest on your heart; for your success in it depends on your desire for it and its ease for you."

The merit of learning

Ayyūb ibn Sulaymān related the following to us:

ʿĀmir ibn Muʿāwiya related to us on the authority of Aḥmad ibn ʿImrān al-Akhnas, who heard it from al-Walīd ibn Ṣāliḥ al-Hāshimī on the authority of ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Kūfī, who took it from Abū Mikhnaḥ on the authority of Kumayl al-Nakhaʿī who said:

ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God honor him, took me by the hand out to the cemetery area. When he reached the desert, he heaved a deep sigh and said, "O Kumayl, hearts are vessels and the best of them are those that contain and retain the most. Therefore remember what I am saying to you— People are of three kinds: a religious learned man; a learner on his way to salvation; and barbarian rabble who follow every bawler, are inclined with every wind, have not been enlightened by learning, and have not resorted to a firm foundation. O Kumayl, learning is better than wealth: learning guards you but wealth must be guarded by you; wealth decreases by expenditure but learning increases by giveaway; and the usefulness of wealth vanishes when the wealth is gone. O Kumayl, the love of learning is a religion one can adopt; by it, a man can earn being obeyed in his lifetime and having a good repute after his death; learning is a ruler, whereas wealth must be a thing ruled. O Kumayl, the treasurers of wealth died when they were alive, but learned men remain as long as time lasts, their physical existence disappears but their moral existence remains in the hearts." Pointing to his chest with his hand, ʿAlī continued, "In *here* is a great amount of learning indeed, if only I can find those who will bear it. Yes, I do find someone who will learn, but he is not trustworthy; he will use the stuff of learning for worldly purposes and will seek to gain the upper hand over God's friends and servants by using God's

arguments and His blessings; or I may find someone who will submit to the bearers of truth but has no insight in his bosom, and doubt is kindled in his heart at the first appearance of an uncertainty. Neither these nor those! Or I may find someone who is desirous of pleasure and easily tractable to lust, or someone who is covetous of amassing wealth and savings, neither of whom is a shepherd of religion at all but more closely resembles freely grazing cattle. And so, learning dies with the death of its bearers. O God, yes. The earth is not without someone who carries God's argument, who lives either in full sight and is well known or who lives in fear and is unknown, and therefore God's arguments and evidences will not be invalidated. But how many are there who are like him, and where are they? Those, by God, are the minority; yet in God's sight, they are the greater ones as far as their value and rank. By them God preserves his arguments until these men transmit them to their equals and plant them in the hearts of those like themselves. Through them, learning takes hold of the truth of faith until they arrive at the soul of certainty. They render tender what those living in luxury find rough, they make affable what the ignorant consider wild, and they exist in the world with bodies whose souls are attached to the Supreme Companion. O Kumayl, those are the vicegerents of God on His earth and the propagators of His religion. Oh, oh, how eager I am to meet them! Now go, if you wish."

Al-Khalil ibn Aḥmad was asked, "Which is better, learning or wealth?" He replied, "Learning." He was asked again, "So why do the learned crowd at the kings' doors, and the kings don't crowd at the doors of the learned?" He answered, "That is because the learned know their duty to the kings but the kings don't know their duty to the learned."

The Prophet, God bless him and grant him peace, said, "The merit of learning is greater than the merit of worship."

He also said, blessings and peace be on him, "Someone of little action who has learning is considered to be of abundant action; and someone of abundant action who is ignorant is considered to be of little action."

He also said, blessings and peace be on him, "This [religious] learning is carried in every generation by those equal to it: they will disallow the textual corruption of falsifiers, the arrogation of liars, and the interpretation of the ignorant."

Al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays said, "The learned are almost divine lords. Every power not confirmed by learning is destined to end in some kind of degradation."

Abū al-Aswad al-Duʿālī said, "Kings are rulers over the world and the learned are rulers over the kings."

Abū Qilāba said, "The learned on earth are like the stars in the sky: whoever abandons them goes astray and whoever is deprived of seeing them is perplexed."

Sufyān ibn ʿUyayna said, "A learned man is like a lamp: whoever comes to him is enlightened by his learning and does not decrease it, just as the one who takes light from a lamp does not decrease it."

One of the *hadīths* says, “God does not starve to death the soul of a pious scholar.”

Al-Ḥasan ibn Abī al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī was asked, “Why has poverty been associated with learning, and wealth with ignorance?” He answered, “What you said is not correct, for you have sought what is little among the few and so you could not find it. You have sought wealth, which is little, among the learned, who are a few; if you had looked for those who were poor among the ignorant, you would have found them to be more in number.”

God, Most Blessed and Most Exalted, said, “Only those of His servants who have knowledge fear God” [Q. 35:28] and “Only those who have knowledge understand them.” [Q. 29:43]

It was said, “Don’t forbid devotees of learning from learning, for you will wrong them; and don’t give learning to anyone other than its devotees, for you will wrong them too.”

And a poet said:

Whoever forbids devotees of wisdom from acquiring it
Becomes practically an oppressor to them.
And whoever offers wisdom to those unwilling to learn it
Is practically unfair to it.
I once heard a current proverb
And I composed it in verse:
There is no good in a person if he is
Neither a seeker of learning nor a learned man.

A learned man was asked, “What do you think of learning?” He replied, “It is my consolation when I am depressed, and my pleasure when I forget [my cares].”

The following verse of Sābiq al-Barbarī was recited:

Learning is an adornment and an honor to its bearer, and
Ignorance and stupidity are inseparably associated together.

Verses by another poet:

If you seek learning, know that it is
A heavy load; so look to what you are carrying.
And when you realize that it has various ranks of excellence,
Occupy your mind with what is the highest rank.

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, “The first thing in the act of learning is silence, the second is listening, the third is memorization, the fourth is putting learning into action, and the fifth is spreading it.”

It has been said, “The learned man and the learner are partners, and the rest are barbarians.”

The following verse was recited:

Learning can't ever be of use to a hard-hearted man,
Just as a stone can't be softened by being chewed.

Mu'adh ibn Jabal said, "Acquire learning, because acquiring it is a good deed, seeking it is an act of worship, and offering it to its devotees is a closeness [to God]. Learning is a lighthouse for people on the way to Paradise, it is a companion when one is lonely, a friend when one is in an alien land, an interlocutor in one's solitude, a guide in good and bad times, an embellishment for bosom friends, and a weapon against the enemies. By it God elevates some people and makes them leaders whose steps should be followed and whose deeds should be emulated. Learning is the life of the mind taking it away from ignorance, the lamp unto the eyes moving them away from darkness, and the strength of the bodies guarding them from weakness. It raises a human being to the ranks of the most excellent people, and leads him to the highest grades in this world and the next. The merit of using one's thought in learning equals the merit of fasting, and that of studying it equals the merit of standing in prayer. With learning, blood relationships are preserved, and what is religiously permitted is distinguished from what is religiously forbidden."

Ibn Ṭabāṭabā al-ʿAlawī said:

He is envious, sick at heart, and conceals his moaning,
And he becomes depressed and sad when he is with me.
He blames me because I have gone to seek learning
And gather its various kinds from [learned] men
So that I may possess original and virgin ideas
And memorize the best of what I learn.
He claims that learning does not bring wealth to one
And he has a good opinion of ugly ignorance.
O you who blame me: let me exaggerate my value;
The value of all people lies in what they know well.

Mastering learning and being sure of it

Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar, may God be pleased with him, was asked, "What is this learning that makes you go so deep into it and away from the world?" He replied, "Whenever I used to put my hands on a book, I made it into a woolen caftan [to keep me warm]."

Raqaba ibn Maṣqala was told, "How abundant your doubt is!" He said, "In defense of certainty."

Shuʿba asked Ayyūb al-Sikhtiyānī about the authenticity of a *ḥadīth* and he said, "I have doubts about it." Shuʿba commented, "I like your doubt more than my certainty."

Ayyūb also said, "There are some among my friends whose blessed invocation [on my behalf] I hope for, but I don't accept the authenticity of the *ḥadīth* they cite."

Wise men said, “Impart your learning to someone who does not know, and acquire your learning from someone who knows. If you do that, you will memorize what you know, and know what you do not know.”

Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī asked ʿĀmir al-Shaʿbī about a matter and he answered, “I don’t know.” Ibrāhīm commented, “By God, this is a truly learned man; he was asked about what he did not know and answered, ‘I don’t know.’”

Mālik ibn Anas said, “When a learned man abandons the use of ‘I don’t know’, he is liable to be hit in his mortal organs.”

ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ said, “Whoever is asked about what he does not know and says ‘I don’t know’, has achieved half of all learning.”

They said, “[Religious] learning is of three kinds: an authenticated *ḥadīth*, an incontrovertible Qur’anic verse, and ‘I don’t know.’” They considered ‘I don’t know’ a kind of learning, if it was truthfully uttered.

Al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad said, “You don’t know your teacher’s error until you sit to learn from another.” Al-Khalīl had been prevailed upon by the Ibāḍiyya sect until he sat with Ayyūb.

They said, “The consequences of things you dislike are commendable.”

And they said, “All good resides in things that have been unwillingly forced on one.”

Presumption of learning

A wise man said, “One should not make undue claims to learning, for God Almighty says, “And of knowledge you have been given only a little” [Q. 17:85] and He also says, “And over every man of knowledge is One who [truly] knows.” [Q. 12:76]

It was related about Moses, the son of ʿImrān, peace be upon him, that when God Most High spoke to him and he studied and memorized the Torah, he was tempted to think that God had not created anyone more learned than him. So God humbled him by sending him al-Khiḍr, peace be upon him.

Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, having been conceitedly puffed up by the pride of learning, said, “Ask me about anything between God’s throne and the lowest area below the earth’s surface.” A man from the group stood up to him and said, “We shall not ask you about anything either under God’s throne or lower than the earth’s surface. But we will ask you about something that was on the earth and God mentioned it in His Book: Tell me about the dog of the People of the Cave, what color was it?” And so, the man dumbfounded Muqātil.

Qatāda said, “I never heard or memorized anything that I later forgot.” Turning to his servant, he then said, “Boy, bring me my sandals.” The servant said, “You are wearing them.” And so, God shamed him.

Abū ʿAmr ibn al-ʿAlāʾ recited the following verse having a similar meaning:

Whoever endows himself with qualities he does not have
Will be disgraced by the evidence of an examination.

The following verses are of a similar meaning:

Whoever endows himself with qualities he does not have
 Will be disgraced in what he claims by the qualities he has.
 When he diminishes his claims to qualities he does not have,
 People will [still] ascribe to him qualities he does not have.
 A man's [real] place will become visible to people
 Even if he tries hard to conceal it
 According to what he claims that is not in him
 And he knows that he is fabricating.

Shabīb ibn Shayba said to a young man from the tribe of Daws, "Don't contend with someone above you, don't say anything without full knowledge, don't deal with anything you have not experienced, don't let your tongue contradict what is in your heart or your speech gainsay your deed, don't leave off matters when they are successful, and don't seek them when they have failed."

Qatāda said, "I have memorized what no one has, and I have been made to forget what no one has been: I memorized the Qurʾān in seven months, and I grasped my beard wanting to cut [the hair] that was under my hand but cut what was above it!"

Al-Shaʿbī passed by al-Suddī as he was interpreting the Qurʾān, and he commented, "If this man was now drunk and his buttocks were being beaten like a drum, wouldn't that be better for him?"

A claimant of learning said:

My people consider me an ignoramus, and yet in me
 There are for them desirable examples of perfect knowledge.
 Not a single obscure fact of knowledge has ever occurred to me
 That I did not fully understand.

ʿAdī ibn al-Riqāʿ said:

I have become so learned that I don't ask any scholar
 About anything in order to increase my knowledge.

Conditions of scholarship and what is good for it

It was said, "No scholar is a scholar unless he has three qualities: he does not scorn those below him, he does not envy those above him, and he does not charge any fee for the learning [he offers]."

It was also said, "The first thing in learning is the fear of God Most High."

Al-Shaʿbī was told, "Give me a legal opinion, O learned man!" He said, "A learned man is the one who fears God."

Al-Ḥasan said, "A man may be a learned man but not a worshiper, and he may be a worshiper but not a wise man."

Muslim ibn Yasār was a learned man, a worshiper, and a wise man.

It was said, "Nothing has been associated with another thing better than clemency with learning, and pardon with power."

It was also said, "The qualities of a perfect scholar include that he should be very dignified, be serious in company, be venerable and silent, be of slow movement and few gesticulations, be calm in appearance, and that he should neither shout, nor be angry, nor become short of breath when speaking, and he should not constantly rub his beard when speaking; for all these are evils denoting the incapability of expressing oneself."

A poet said:

He is often short of breath, constantly turning around and coughing,
Rubbing his beard and twiddling his fingers.

Praising a man, Khālīd ibn Ṣafwān said, "He was of wonderful enunciation, of ample diction, of pure Arab tongue, of few movements, of fine gesticulations, of good manners, and of abundant grace; he was silent and venerable, and he treated one's pains with kind words, did not overdo a subject, and was always to the point; he was not a person of little manliness or of idle talk; he was a leader and not a follower,

... He was like a mountain with a fire on its peak."

ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Mubārak said of Mālīk ibn Anas, may God be pleased with him:

He declines to answer, so he is not asked again out of awe,
And those who come to ask do so with lowered heads.
He is the epitome of venerability and of deep piety.
He is awe-inspiring although he is not a man of power.

ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Mubārak said of him also:

He is silent, should silence adorn those who can keep it;
Yet he can create virgin ideas of gem-studded speech.
He holds to all the wisdom the Qurʾān has,
And good manners and decency are embodied in him.

ʿAbd al-Malik and a man

A man entered the presence of ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān. Whatever the latter asked him about, he found that the man had knowledge of it. "How have you come by all this?" the caliph asked him. The man replied, "O Commander of the Faithful, I have never prevented learning from reaching me in which there was a benefit to others, nor have I scorned any learning from which there was a benefit to me; and whenever I met someone, I took from him and I gave him."

It was said, "If men of learning had safeguarded their learning, they would have ruled the people of the world; but they have misplaced it, and the people of the world have been remiss in their duty toward them."

Preserving learning and using it

‘Abd Allāh ibn Mas‘ūd said: “Acquire learning; and when you have learned, work accordingly.”

Mālik ibn Dīnār said, “If a learned man does not work according to his learning, his teaching will slide off the hearts [of learners] as water slides off a smooth rock.”

It was said, “If it were not for work, learning would not have been sought; and if it were not for learning, work would not have been sought.”

Al-Ṭā‘ī said:

No learned man is praised who does not work,
And no worker is praised who is not learned.

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, God be pleased with him said, “O people, learn God’s Book and you will be known by it; work according to it and you will be among its people.”

It was said, “If a word comes out of a [speaker’s] heart, it falls into the [listener’s] heart; and if it comes off of the [former’s] tongue, it does not go beyond the [latter’s] ears.”

Narrating on the authority of Mālik, Ziyād said, “Be a learned man, a learner, or a listener; and beware of the third possibility, for it leads to perdition. And you will not be a learned man until you work accordingly, nor will you be a believer until you are pious.”

Abū al-Ḥasan said, “Wakī‘ ibn al-Jarrāḥ used to memorize three *ḥadīths* every day.”

Al-Sha‘bī and al-Zuhri used to say, “We never heard a *ḥadīth* and asked that it be repeated to us.”

Learning carried off

‘Abd Allāh ibn Mas‘ūd said, “Acquire learning before it is carried off.”

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “God does not cause learning to expire by snatching it away from humankind; but He causes it to expire by making learned men die.”

‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās, may God be pleased with them both, said when Zayd ibn Thābit was buried in his grave, “Whoever wishes to see how learning expires, this is how it expires.”

The bias of the ignorant against the learned

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “Woe betide someone who knows a matter, when he comes in contact with someone who does not know it.”

It was said, “If you want to dumbfound a scholar, bring him an ignorant person.”

And it was also said, “Don’t debate with an ignorant or a disputatious person, for he will take the debate as a means to learn without being thankful.”

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “Have mercy on a powerful person who has been humbled, a rich man who has been impoverished, and a scholar who is lost among ignorant men.”

Kaysān came to al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad to ask him about something. Al-Khalīl gave it some thought before answering then began speaking. Kaysān said, “I don’t know what you are talking about.” Al-Khalīl commented with the following verses:

If you knew what I was saying, you would excuse me;
Or if I did not know what you were saying, I would blame you.
But you did not know what I was saying, so you blamed me;
And I knew that you were an ignorant man, so I excused you.

Ḥabīb said:

Many a man blaming me have I blamed because of his blame
And, because of his ignorance, he thought I was ignorant too.
Nothing deceives a dupe like his own mind.
How can you ever get through to your brother, undiminished?

Venerating and honoring scholars

Zayd ibn Thābit and Ibn ‘Abbās

Al-Shaʿbī said, “Zayd ibn Thābit mounted his horse and ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās took hold of his stirrup. Zayd expostulated, “Don’t do that, O cousin of God’s Messenger, may God bless him and give him peace.” “This is what we were ordered to do with our learned men,” replied ‘Abd Allāh. “Show me your hand,” Zayd said. ‘Abd Allāh showed him his hand, so Zayd took it and kissed it, saying, “This is what we were commanded to do with our Prophet’s cousin.”

It was said, “Serving a scholar is an act of worship.”

‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, said, “When you come to a scholar, it is your duty that you should greet him in particular and those with him in general, then you should sit in front of him, not gesture with your hand and not wink, and you should not say, ‘So-and-So said contrary to what you had said.’ Furthermore, you should not hold him by his robe and be persistent in asking him questions; for he is like a palm tree with ripe dates from which something will continually fall down on you.”

And it was said, “When you sit before a scholar, ask him questions in order to learn from him and not in order to wrangle with him.”

Abstruse questions

Al-Awzā'ī said on the authority of 'Abd Allāh ibn Sa'd, who took the information from al-Ṣunābiḥī on the authority of Mu'āwiya ibn Abi Sufyān, who said, "God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, forbade asking captious questions." Al-Awzā'ī explained, "He meant: difficult questions."

When Ibn Sirīn was asked about a matter in which there was a captious question, he used to answer the one who asked by saying, "Hold it until I ask your brother Satan about it."

'Amr ibn Qays asked Mālik ibn Anas about [the moral status of] a pilgrim in the state of ritual consecration who had pulled out a fox's two fangs, but Mālik did not answer him at all.

'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, asked 'Alī ibn Abi Ṭālib, may God honor him, "What do you think of a man whose mother is with another man?" 'Alī answered, "He should keep away from her." 'Umar meant a man who dies while his mother is with another man; and by 'he should keep away from her', 'Alī meant the husband should keep away from the dead man's mother until she freed herself of inheritance matters.

A man asked 'Umar ibn Qays what a person should do with a small pebble from the pebbles of the mosque that might be found in his robe or his shoe, or on his forehead [from prostrating himself in prayer]. 'Umar replied, "Throw it away." The man said, "It has been claimed that the pebble will continue to scream until it is returned to the mosque." 'Umar commented, "Let it scream until its throat splits." The man said, "Praise be to God! Does it have a throat?" 'Umar answered, "How else can it scream then?"

A man asked Mālik ibn Anas about God's saying, "The Compassionate sat on the Throne," [Q. 20:5] and inquired about the modality of this sitting. Mālik replied, "The sitting is known but the modality is unknown; and I think you are but an evil man."

Mālik ibn Anas narrated a *ḥadīth* from God's Messenger who said, "When any one of you wakes up from his sleep, let him wash his hand before putting it in any vessel, for no one knows where one's hand was [during one's sleep]." A man asked him, "Abū 'Abd Allāh, what shall we do regarding the *mihrās*?" (The *mihrās* was the basin in Mecca where people performed their ritual ablutions.) Mālik answered, "Only God knows. The Messenger delivers the message and we have only to accept it. Let this *ḥadīth* stand."

Ibn 'Abbās, may God be pleased with both of them, was asked, "What do you think about a man who divorced his wife as many times as there are stars in heaven?" He replied, "Of all them, the twin stars of Gemini should be sufficient for him."

'Alī ibn Abi Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, was asked, "Where was our Lord before He created heaven and earth?" He answered, "*Where* requires place, and God Almighty and Most Exalted existed when there was no place."

Textual corruption

Mentioning a man known for corrupting texts, al-Aṣmaʿī said, “He used to hear then retain in his memory something other than what he had heard, to write something other than what he had retained, and to read in the book something other than what had been written in it.”

Another person mentioned a man known for textual corruption and said, “When he copied an [Arabic] book twice, it turned into Syriac.”

Seeking learning for other than God’s Reward

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “If people are given religious learning but are prevented from acting [accordingly], and if they express mutual love by their tongues but hate one another in their hearts and cut off blood relationships, God will curse them and render them dumb and blind.”

And the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “Shall I tell you who the worst people are?” They replied, “Yes, O Messenger of God.” He said, “The scholars, when they are corrupt.”

Al-Fuḍayl ibn ʿIyāḍ said, “Religious scholars used to be the people’s springtime: when a sick man saw them he was not pleased [just] to be healthy; and when a poor man looked at them, he did not want to be rich. Today they have become a cause of dissension among people.”

Jesus, the son of Mary, peace be upon him, said, “At the end of time, there will be religious scholars who will teach others to renounce worldly pleasures but they themselves will not renounce them; they will make others desire the Hereafter but they themselves will not desire it; they will proscribe to others currying favor with rulers but they will not proscribe that to themselves; they will bring the rich close to themselves and will push away the poor; they will display friendliness to the grandees and will shut themselves off from the paupers – those scholars are the devils’ brethren and the enemies of [God,] the Compassionate One.”

Muḥammad ibn Wāsiʿ said, “To seek the world by uglier means than those by which you seek the Hereafter is better than to seek it by better means than those by which you seek the Hereafter.”

Al-Ḥasan said, “Learning is of two kinds: a learning in the heart, and that is the useful learning; and a learning in the tongue, and that is God’s evidence against His servants.”

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “When the devils go out to jurisprudents and memorizers of the Qurʾān, the latter will say to them, ‘Get away from us and turn [your attention] to idol worshipers.’ And they will complain to God, but He will say to them, ‘Someone who knows is not like someone who does not.’”

Mālik ibn Dīnār said, “He who seeks learning for himself will be satisfied with a little of it; and he who seeks it for the people will find that people’s needs are numerous.”

Ibn Shubruma said, “Learning has gone except for remnants of it in vessels of evil.”

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “Whoever seeks learning for the following four reasons will enter Hell: to vie with other scholars in it, to use it in wrangling with the foolish, to win over the notables to himself with it, or to take gifts from the ruler by it.”

Mālik ibn Dīnār spoke and made his friends weep. Then he missed his copy of the Qurʾān, so he looked at his friends, all of whom were weeping, and he said, “Woe to you! You are all weeping. Who then took my copy of the Qurʾān?”

Aḥmad ibn Abī al-Ḥawārī said, “On the way to pilgrimage, Abū Sulaymān said to me, ‘O Aḥmad, God said to Moses, the son of ʿImrān, “Command the wrong-doers of Israel not to mention Me, for I will curse anyone of them who mentions Me until he falls silent.” Woe to you, Aḥmad! I was told that whoever goes on pilgrimage with illicit money then says the ritual sentence, *Here I am at Your service*, God Most Blessed and Most High will tell him, “There will be no *Here I am at Your service*, and no *Double bliss be to You* until you pay back what your hands possess.”’ Who can be sure that this will not be said to us?”

A section on anecdotes of scholars and litterateurs

Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Salām al-Khushanī dictated that ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās was asked about Abū Bakr, may God be pleased with him, so he said, “By God, he was all good, despite his vehemence.” He was then asked, “Tell us about ʿUmar, may God be pleased with him.” Ibn ʿAbbās said, “By God, he was like a cautious bird for whom a snare had been set up and he was ever afraid of falling into it.” He was then asked, “Tell us about ʿUthmān, may God be pleased with him.” Ibn ʿAbbās said, “By God, he was a man who fasted and prayed abundantly.” He was then asked, “Tell us about ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him.” And Ibn ʿAbbās said, “By God, he was a man of great learning and insight. Suffice it for him that he was a man whose precedence [in adopting Islam] gave him power, and whose blood relationship to God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, gave him priority. Whenever he needed anything he usually obtained it.” Ibn ʿAbbās was told, “It is said he was limited,” and he answered, “That is what you say.”

Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib

It was related that a man came to al-Ḥasan and said, “Abū Saʿīd, it has been claimed that you hate ʿAlī.” Al-Ḥasan wept until his beard became moist [with tears], then he said, “ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib was God’s appropriate arrow with which He hit His enemies. He was the prelate of this [Islamic] community, its prior,

and its man of merit, and he was closely related to God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace. He was not a man who would neglect God's commands, shirk the pursuit of God's rights, or steal God's money. He gave the Qurʾān all his faculties and won from it comely gardens and distinguished banners. This is ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, O infamous man.”

Khālīd ibn Ṣafwān was asked about al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, so he said, “More than any other man among the people, his public speech and his secret inner thought were similar; and more than any other man among them, he abided by what he ordered others to do. What a man he was: he did without the world which the people possessed, and they needed the religion which he possessed.”

‘Urwa ibn al-Zubayr entered a garden belonging to ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān and he said, “How beautiful this garden is!” “By God, you are more beautiful than it,” ‘Abd al-Malik said, “for the garden offers its crop once a year, while you offer your crop every day.”

Muḥammad ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī said, “I entered into the presence of ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān in the company of other men from Medina. He saw that I was the youngest of them, so he asked me, ‘Who are you?’ I informed him of my parentage, so he recognized me. Then he said, ‘Your father and uncle were two objecting screamers in the sedition of Ibn al-Zubayr.’ ‘Commander of the Faithful,’ I said, ‘when someone like you forgives, he does not return to remind; and when he pardons, he does not blame.’ ‘Where did you grow up?’ he asked. ‘In Medina,’ I said. ‘And who were your teachers?’ he asked. ‘Ibn Yasār, Ibn Abī Dhuʾayb, and Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyib.’ He said, ‘They don’t compare with ‘Urwa ibn al-Zubayr, for he was a sea [of learning] whose depths could not be muddied by buckets.’”

The [Prophet’s] Companions were mentioned in the presence of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, so he said, “May God have mercy on them. They were present [with the Prophet] and we were absent; they knew things and we did not. So we follow them regarding whatever they had consensus on, and we refrain from whatever they differed on.”

Jaʿfar ibn Sulaymān said, “I heard ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Mahdī say, ‘I have never seen anyone who was more ascetical than Shuʿba, more worshipful than Sufyān, or a better memorizer than Ibn al-Mubārak.’

“And he said, ‘I have never seen the like of the following three men: ‘Aṭāʾ ibn Abī Rabāḥ in Mecca, Muḥammad ibn Sirīn in Iraq, and Rajāʾ ibn Ḥaway in Syria.’”

The Meccans were asked, “What was ‘Aṭāʾ ibn Abī Rabāḥ like, when he was among you?” They said, “He was like health that one does not appreciate until one loses it.”

‘Aṭāʾ ibn Abī Rabāḥ was black, one-eyed, flat-nosed, paralyzed, and lame, then he became blind. His mother was a black woman named Baraka.

Al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays was one-eyed and lame; but when he spoke, he expressed himself well.

Al-Shaʿbī said, “If [as a fetus] I had not been crowded in the womb, no one would have been able to stand up to me.” He was one of twins.

Ṭāwūs was told, “Qatāda is here and wants to come to you.” He said, “If he comes, I will stand up [to go].” He was told, “He is a knowledgeable legist.” He said, “Satan is more knowledgeable, for he said, ‘Lord, as You have led me astray.’” [Q. 15:39]

Al-Shaʿbī said, “The [ideal] judges are four: ʿUmar, ʿAlī, Abū Mūsā, and ʿAbd Allāh.”

Al-Ḥasan said, “[Two groups of] three men who were a son, a father, and a grandfather were companions of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace: ʿAbd al-Rahmān ibn Abī Bakr ibn Abī Quḥāfa, and Maʿn ibn Yazīd ibn al-Akhnas al-Sulamī.”

ʿUbayd Allāh ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUtba ibn Masʿūd was a legist and a poet; and he was one of the seven legists of Medina.

Al-Zuhri said, “Whenever I met with ʿUbayd Allāh ibn ʿAbd Allāh, it was as if I were cleaving a surging sea with him.”

ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz said, “I wish I did not miss any session with ʿUbayd Allāh ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUtba ibn Masʿūd.”

Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyib said to him on meeting him, “Are you a legist *and* a poet?” ʿUbayd Allāh replied, “A man affected with an ailment in the breast must have [poetic] outpourings.”

Having heard that ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz had said something about him that he did not like, ʿUbayd Allāh ibn ʿAbd Allāh wrote the following verses to him:

O Abū Ḥafṣ, I heard that you said something about me,
Which displeased me, and I was at a loss to answer it.
O Abū Ḥafṣ, I don't know if you wanted to humiliate me
By what you endeavored or else to blame me.
If you wanted to blame me, I will satisfy you; otherwise,
[Know that] my wood is not a mere twig of a forest.
I abandoned men of greater importance than you
And I have even buried beloved ones in the soil
Who had been dear to me but had forsaken me;
Yet, [unruffled,] I dressed up after they were gone.

Khalīd ibn Yazīd ibn Muʿāwiya Abū Ḥāshim was a studious and well-read learned man, who sometimes composed poetry, of which are the following verses:

For once, will you benefit by your learning?
For learning is useful.
And will you listen to an adviser
Giving you apposite opinion?
Death is a basin, and there is no
Free scope in it: all creatures will drink from it.
Therefore, plant acts of piety,
For you will reap what you plant.

ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz said, “Umayya has not given birth to anyone like Khālīd ibn Yazīd, and I don’t exclude ʿUthmān and others.”

Al-Ḥasan was at a funeral in which there were lamenting women, and with him was Saʿīd ibn Jubayr, who was about to leave. Al-Ḥasan said to him, “If every time you see an ignominy you leave something good instead, this will fast make its way to your religion.”

ʿĪsā ibn Ismāʿīl said on the authority of Ibn ʿĀʾisha who took the information from Ibn al-Mubārak, “Sufyān al-Thawrī taught me to summarize [the Prophet’s] Ḥadīth.”

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, “Shuʿba related the following to us, ‘I entered Medina and found that Mālīk had a circle [of students], and that Nāfiʿ had died a year earlier; this was in the year one hundred and eighteen [A.H.]’.”

Abū al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad said, “God has not created anyone more knowledgeable about the [Prophet’s] Ḥadīth than Yaḥyā ibn Maʿīn: *ḥadīths* used to be brought to him that had been mixed up and had transposed [ascriptions]; and he would say, ‘This *ḥadīth* belongs to this [ascription] and that one to that.’ And it would be as he said.”

Sharīk said, “I would hear a word, and my color would change because of it.”

Ibn al-Mubārak said, “Everyone who had been mentioned to me on his authority, I found to be less [dependable] than had been mentioned – except Ḥaywa ibn Shurayḥ and Abū ʿAwn.”

Ḥaywa ibn Shurayḥ used to sit with the people [to teach] and his mother would say to him, “Ḥaywa, [go and] toss some barley to the chickens,” and he would rise [and do so].

Abū al-Ḥasan said, “Sulaymān al-Taymī heard three thousand *ḥadīths* from Sufyān al-Thawrī.”

Yaḥyā ibn al-Yamān used to do everything conceivable for his son Dāwūd. One day he said to him, “God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, used to [lead the prayer], then ʿAbd Allāh did, then ʿAlqama, then Ibrāhīm, then Maṣṣūr, then Sufyān, then Wakīʿ. Now get up, Dāwūd.” He meant he was worthy of leading the prayer. Dāwūd died in the year two hundred and four [A.H.].

Al-Ḥasan said, “My father related the following to me, ‘Al-Ḥajjāj ordered that only an Arab may lead the prayer in al-Kūfa. Yaḥyā ibn Waṭṭhāb used to lead his people, the Banū Asad, in prayer – and he was a client of theirs – so they said to him, ‘Retire.’ He said, ‘Al-Ḥajjāj did not mean to forbid someone like me. I am attributed to the Arabs.’ They refused [his plea]. So he went to al-Ḥajjāj and read. Al-Ḥajjāj asked, ‘Who is this man?’ They said, ‘Yaḥyā ibn Waṭṭhāb.’ He asked, ‘What is his problem?’ They said, ‘You ordered that only an Arab may lead the prayer, so his people removed him.’ Al-Ḥajjāj said, ‘I did not forbid someone like this man. He may lead them in prayer.’ So Yaḥyā ibn Waṭṭhāb led them in the prayers of dawn, noon, afternoon, sunset, and evening; then he

said, 'Find yourselves a prayer-leader other than me. I only wanted you not to consider me lowly. Now that the matter is up to me, will I lead you in prayer? No. Absolutely not.'"

Al-Ḥasan said, "Yaḥyā ibn al-Yamān used to lead his people in prayer, then his people banded against him and said, 'Don't lead us in prayer. We don't want you; and if you do, we'll remove you.' He brought his sword, unsheathed the length of four fingers' width of it, and put it in the prayer niche, saying, 'Let no one approach me, or else I will thrust this sword into him.' They said, 'Let Sharik be an intermediary between you and us.' They brought him to Sharik and said, 'This man used to lead us in prayer and we hated him.' Sharik asked, 'Who is he?' They replied, 'Yaḥyā ibn al-Yamān.' 'Enemies of God!' Sharik said, 'Is there in al-Kūfa anyone comparable to Yaḥyā? No one should lead you in prayer other than him.' When Yaḥyā was dying, he said to his son Dāwūd, 'I almost lost my religion because of these people. If they will need you after my death, don't lead them in prayer.'"

Yaḥyā ibn al-Yamān said, "When I married Dāwūd's mother, I had nothing on the wedding night but a watermelon, of which I ate half and she ate half. When she gave birth to Dāwūd, we had nothing to swaddle him in, so I bought him a garment for two grains and we swaddled him in it."

Al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad said, "Alī had two plaits, and so did Ibn Mas'ūd."

ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān mentioned Rawḥ and said, "No one has been endowed with what Abū Zurʿa has been: he has been endowed with the jurisprudence of Hejaz, the cunning of the people of Iraq, and the obedience of the people of Syria."

It was related that Mālik ibn Anas used to mention 'Alī, 'Uthmān, Ṭalḥa, and al-Zubayr and say, "By God, they did not fight each other for anything but a white broth of bread crumbs."

Muḥammad ibn Yazīd mentioned this in *Al-Kāmil* and then said, "As for Abū Saʿīd al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, he used to disapprove of the arbitration [between 'Alī and his opponents] and he disagreed with those who held to it. Whenever he sat down and was settled in his seat, he used to mention 'Uthmān and call down mercy upon him thrice and curse his murderers thrice, saying, 'If we don't curse them, we will be cursed.' Then he would mention 'Alī and say, 'Alī, the Commander of the Faithful, God's blessings be upon him, continued to be victorious and favored with blessings until he accepted arbitration.' He would then add, 'Why would you accept arbitration when right is on your side? Shouldn't you continue, may your father be damned?'"

Although these [last] words may be harsh, an Arab uses them to mean praise, as when he says, "Look into the affairs of your subjects, may your father be damned!" A bedouin Arab poet said:

Lord of all people, what is the problem with us and you?
 You used to give us water to drink; what happened to you?
 Send down rain on us, may your father be damned!

Ibn Abī al-Ḥawārī said, “I said to Sufyān, ‘I was told about God’s saying, may He be exalted, “Except for him who comes to God with a sound heart,” [Q. 26:89] that it means him who meets God with no one else in his heart but Him.’ So Sufyān wept and said, ‘I have not heard a more beautiful saying than this in thirty years.’”

Ibn al-Mubārak said, “I was in a ship with Muḥammad ibn al-Naḍr al-Ḥārithī and I thought, ‘What shall I say to make him speak?’ So I asked, ‘What do you think of fasting when one is traveling?’ ‘Son of my brother,’ he said, ‘this is only to break the ice.’ Then, by God, he gave me a formal legal opinion different from that of Ibrāhīm and al-Shaʿbī.”

Al-Fuḍayl ibn ʿIyāḍ said, “Muḥammad ibn Wāsiʿ and Mālīk ibn Dīnār met at a gathering in Basra. Mālīk ibn Dīnār said, ‘It is either obedience to God or Hell.’ Muḥammad ibn Wāsiʿ said to those nearest to him, ‘We used to say: It is either God’s forgiveness or Hell.’ Mālīk ibn Dīnār said, ‘I like to think that a man should have a livelihood sufficient to afford him sustenance.’ Muḥammad ibn Wāsiʿ said, ‘This is as if you are saying: I like it that a man should enter the morning and have no lunch [to eat], that he should enter the evening and have no supper [to eat], and that in spite of this he should remain grateful to God, may He be exalted.’ Mālīk then said, ‘How needy I am for an admonishment from someone like you!’”

A young man used to sit to learn from Sufyān in a state of deep thought and with a bowed head. Sufyān wanted to stir him up and make him listen to his words, so he remarked, “Young man, those who were before us rode noble horses and we have remained riding donkeys covered with sores.” The young man said, “O Abū ʿAbd Allāh, if we are on the right path, we will quickly catch up with the others.”

Al-Aṣmaʿī said on the authority of Shuʿba, “Of all the men on whose authority I have related information to you whom you know and don’t know, Ayyūb, Yūnus, Ibn ʿAwn, and Sulaymān are best.”

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, “Salām ibn Abī Muṭṭiʿ related to me, saying, ‘Ayyūb is the most learned in jurisprudence, Sulaymān al-Taymī the most devoted to worship, Yūnus the most parsimonious with money, and Ibn ʿAwn the most able to control himself when speaking.’”

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, “Nāfiʿ ibn Abī Nuʿaym related to us on the authority of Rabiʿa ibn Abī ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, saying, ‘One thousand [*ḥadīths*] on the authority of one thousand [persons] are better than one on the authority of one. *So-and-So on the authority of So-and-So* takes away the Tradition from your hands.’”

Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī was walking when al-Aʿmash [the Blear-Eyed] met him and walked with him then said, “O Ibrāhīm, when people see us together, they will say, ‘A blear-eyed and a one-eyed!’ Ibrāhīm said, ‘Why should you care if they sin and you are rewarded?’ Al-Aʿmash retorted, ‘Why should you care if they are safe and we are too?’”

Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī and Ibn Jubayr

Sufyān al-Thawrī related the following on the authority of Waṣīl al-Aḥḍab:

I said to Ibrāhīm, “Saʿīd ibn Jubayr says, ‘[The contractual marriage formula] *every woman I marry must be divorced* is nothing to me.’ Ibrāhīm commented, ‘Tell him to soak his buttocks in cold water.’” So I said to Saʿīd what Ibrāhīm had ordered me to say, and Saʿīd commented, “Tell him, ‘If you pass by the valley of the stupid, camp in it.’”

Muḥammad ibn Munādhir said:

Whoever seeks advice, I have advice for
Men of mature age and for young men:
Take as authentic what you learn from Mālik and Ibn ʿAwn
But don’t relate the *ḥadīths* of Ibn Dāb.

Another poet said:

O seeker of knowledge,
Come to Ḥammād Ibn Zayd:
Acquire discernment and learning
And record it in a notebook.

It was said to Abū Nuwās, “They sent after Abū ʿUbayda and al-Aṣmaʿī in order to bring them together.” He said, “As for Abū ʿUbayda, he will read to them the legends of the ancients if they provide him with his book; as for al-Aṣmaʿī, he is a nightingale in a cage and will thrill them with his singing.”

Muḥammad ibn Ishāq and ʿĪsā ibn Daʿb were mentioned in the presence of al-Manṣūr, and he said, “As for Ibn Ishāq, he is the most knowledgeable of all people with regard to the [Prophet’s] biography; as for Ibn Daʿb, if you take him away from stories of Dāḥīs and al-Ghabrāʾ, he knows nothing.”

Al-Maʿmūn, may God Most High have mercy on him, said, “Whoever wants to have entertainment without restraint, let him listen to al-Ḥasan al-Ṭalībī.”

Al-ʿAttābī was asked about al-Ḥasan al-Ṭalībī and he said, “Because of his good company, he renders the person who sits with him more thrilled than camels on hearing the cameleer’s song or a drunken man on hearing singing.”

Sayings about Qurʾān memorizers

A man said to Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī, “I make a complete reading of the Qurʾān every three [nights].” Al-Nakhaʿī answered, “I wish you would make a complete reading of it every thirty and would understand what you read.”

Al-Ḥārith al-Aʿwar said, “ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭalīb, may God be pleased with him, related to me that he had heard God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, say, ‘God’s Book contains reports on what came before you, news of what will come after you, and rules about relationships among you. It is the

decisive criterion and not an amusing jest. It is the Book which passions will not go astray in and scholars will not be satiated with. It does not become old despite repetition and its wonders have no end. If it is disregarded by a powerful tyrant, God will break him. Whosoever seeks guidance in other sources, God will cause him to go astray. It is God's strong rope, it is the great Remembrance, and it is the Straight Path.' Then 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib added, 'Learn all this, O A'war.'"

It was said to the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, "White hair has come too soon to you, O Messenger of God." He said, "*Hūd* [Q. 11] and its sisters have given me the white hair."

'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd said, "[Chapters Q. 40–46 beginning with] *Hā Mīm* are the silk brocade of the Qur'ān."

And he said [about these chapters], "When I like to graze freely, I do so in mellow gardens in which I delight myself elegantly."

Ā'isha, may God Most High be pleased with her, said, "When a verse [of the Qur'ān] was revealed to us in the time of God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, we would memorize its permitted and forbidden actions, and its prescriptions and proscriptions, before we memorized the rest of it."

And he, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, "In my community, there will be people who will read the Qur'ān but it will not go beyond their collar bones [to their hearts]. They will stray from religion as an arrow strays from game. They are the worst of all creatures."

And he also said, "The devils are faster to go out to the unrighteous Qur'ān memorizers than they are to idol worshipers. The Qur'ān memorizers will complain to their Lord, but He will say to them, 'Someone who knows is not like someone who does not.'"

Al-Ḥasan said, "Memorizers of the Qur'ān are three [kinds of] men: a man who has considered the Qur'ān as merchandise that he transports from country to country to seek through it what people will offer him; a man who has memorized the Qur'ān's letters but has lost sight of its divine ordinances, and with it seeks gifts from the rulers and superiority over the people of his country (this kind of Qur'ān memorizers are many, may God Almighty not increase them); and a man who has read the Qur'ān and taken its medicine to heal the disease of his heart, so he would stay up at night with tears flowing from his eyes, don humility and dignity, and feel sorrow. By God, this last kind of Qur'ān memorizers are as rare as red sulfur; through them God sends rain, brings victory about, and drives disaster away."

Reason

Saḥbān Wā'il said, "Reason develops with experience, for instinctual reason is a ladder that leads to experiential reason."

That is why 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, said, "The opinion of an old man is better than the declaration of a lad."

A man of reason should be knowledgeable about the people of his time, in control of his tongue, and attentive to his affairs.

Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said, “The tongue of a man of reason is behind his heart. When he wants to speak, he thinks [first], and if the matter is in his favor, he speaks; if it is not, he remains silent. [However,] the heart of a stupid man follows behind his tongue. He speaks when he wants to speak. Even though it might be in his favor to speak, he remains silent; and if it is not in his favor to speak, he [still] speaks.”

Sulaymān ibn ‘Abd al-Malik and a man whose speaking he liked

Muḥammad ibn al-Ghāz said, “A man entered the presence of Sulaymān ibn ‘Abd al-Malik and spoke so well that Sulaymān was pleased and wanted to test him to see whether the man’s reason was commensurate with his speaking or not. He found him lacking and said, “The superiority of one’s reason over one’s speaking is wisdom, and the superiority of one’s speaking over one’s reason is a defect, and the best situation is when one authenticates the other.” Then he recited the following verses:

Man is only valued by his two small things: his tongue
And his reasoning; his body is a mere created image.
If [on the outside] you see in him what pleases, perhaps
The [real] taste of the twig is bitter, for the twig is green.

One of the best of what was said on this idea is Zuhayr’s saying:

How many a man you see who pleases you when he is silent,
Yet his increase or decrease in value is when he speaks.
A man’s tongue is half of him, his other half is his heart;
And nothing else remains but the image of flesh and blood.

‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, said, “Reason is in the brain, laughter in the liver, compassion in the spleen, and voice in the lung.”

Al-Mughīra ibn Shuḥba was asked about ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, and he said, “By God, he was better than to cheat and wiser than to be cheated. And he is the one who said, ‘I am not a swindler, and a swindler cannot cheat me.’”

Ziyād said, “A judicious man is not one who, if he falls into difficulty, contrives to get out of it; but rather, he is one who makes every effort not to fall into it.”

‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ was asked, “What is reason?” He answered, “It is being right by assuming, and knowing what will be by considering what has been.”

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, said, “He who does not benefit by his assumption will not benefit by his certainty.”

‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, said when mentioning [‘Abd Allāh] ibn ‘Abbās, may God be pleased with both of them, “He used to look into the invisible Unknown as though through a thin veil.”

And it was said, "A wise man is an intelligent man who feigns inadvertence."

Mu'āwiya said, "Reason is a measuring utensil, one-third of which is intelligence and two-thirds are pretence of absent-mindedness."

Al-Mughīra ibn Shu'ba asked 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, when he deposed him from his position as secretary to Abū Mūsā, "Is it because of inefficiency or treason that you have deposed me?" "Because of neither," replied 'Umar, "rather, I did not like to force the superiority of your mind upon the common people."

Mu'āwiya said to 'Amr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, "What is the farthest extent to which your mind reached?" 'Amr answered, "Whenever I got into anything, I always came out of it." Mu'āwiya commented, "As for me, I never got into anything and wanted to come out of it."

Al-Aṣma'ī said, "Since al-Ḥasan ibn Sahl came to the rank of minister, I have never heard him cite any verses other than the following:

Of all pleasures, only conversation
With men of reason has remained.
They used to be few, when mentioned,
But they have now become less than a few."

Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir said (the verses are also attributed to Maḥmūd al-Warrāq):

By your life, it is not by reason that wealth is acquired,
Nor is it by money that reason is obtained.
How many a man of little money is praised for his merits,
And how many a man of wealth has no merit at all!
Never has a favor been conferred on someone
By an ignorant man that was not impaired by ignorance.
If an intelligent man does not give, his mind is praised;
And if he gives, his speech and deed embellish him.

Muḥammad ibn Munādhir said:

You may see that people are many but when
Men of reason are counted, their numbers become small.
A man does not become of less value by being economical,
Nor does a man increase his value by being lavish.
Don't promise an evil but rather promise what is good,
And don't break a promise but hasten to redeem your pledge.
Don't compose poetry and don't intend to benefit by it;
But if you compose poetry, let it be good.

Another poet said:

A man's good reason is known from four things:
His gait, how he starts and how he moves,
And the motion of his eyes and his words,

Upon which revolves the sphere of his identity.
 Perhaps they may disappoint, except those
 Of them that can be called yours.
 These are the indications of his reason,
 For reason in its basic elements is like a king.
 If it is sound, the man will be sound with it;
 But he will perish if it perishes.
 Look then at a man's way of comporting himself
 And at his mind, and not at what he possesses.
 Oftentimes, people of reason may be mixed
 And stupidity may exist among those who are hermits.
 If a leader asks you for a meritorious man,
 Guide him then to the man of reason – damn you!

Hawdha and Chosroës

Hawdha ibn 'Alī al-Ḥanafī used to drive the caravan of Chosroës which carried perfume and silk to him every year. He came to Chosroës [one year] and Chosroës asked him about his sons, so he named several of them to him. Chosroës asked, "Whom do you love most among them?" He replied, "The young one until he grows up, the absent one until he returns, and the sick one until he recovers." "And what do you eat in your country?" asked Chosroës. Hawdha said, "Bread." Chosroës said, commenting to those sitting with him, "This is the brain of bread." He preferred it to the brains of the desert people whose food is milk and dates.

Hawdha ibn 'Alī is the one about whom al-A'shā of the tribe of Bakr said:

Anyone seeing Hawdha prostrates himself to him unabashedly
 Whether wearing a turban on the crown of his head or not.
 He has diadems which his jeweler has studded
 With rubies, and in them you see no defect or blemish.

Abū 'Ubayda said on the authority of Abū 'Amr, "No man of the Ma'add tribes [of northern Arabia] ever wore a crown. Crowns were rather worn by [the Arabs of] Yemen." Abū 'Ubayda asked him about [the diadems of] Hawdha ibn al-Ḥanafī and Abū 'Amr said, "They were merely beads that were strung together for him."

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, wrote to Hawdha ibn 'Alī inviting him to adopt Islam as he wrote to the kings.

In one *ḥadīth*, there is the following, "When God Almighty created reason, He said to it, 'Come forward,' so it came; then He said to it, 'Go back,' so it did. He said, 'By My Power and Majesty, I have not created a creature more lovable to me than you; and I have placed you nowhere but among the most beloved creatures to me.' When He created stupidity, He said to it, 'Come forward,' so it went back; then He said to it, 'Go back,' and it came forward. He said, 'By

my Power and Majesty, I have not created a creature more detestable to me than you; and I have placed you nowhere but among the most detestable creatures to me.’”

People have known God Almighty by reason, and no one with reason is doubtful about Him. God Almighty says about all nations, “If you ask them who created them, they will say, ‘God.’” [Q. 43:87]

Interpreters of the Qur’ān explained God’s saying, “An oath for a man with a *hijr*” [Q. 89:5] as ‘a man with reason.’”

And it was said, “The supposition of a man of reason is prognostication.”

Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said, “If all people had reason, the [attractions of this] world would be ruined.”

And a poet said:

A man of reason is deemed high among his people,
Although he may not be of noble birth.
If he settles down in a land, he lives in it by his reason;
No man of reason is a stranger in any town.

It was said, “A man of reason protects his wealth with his power, himself with his wealth, and his religion with his soul.”

Al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays said, “I am more hopeful to a man of reason who is going away [from me] than I am to a stupid man who is coming forward [to me].”

He said, “When God Almighty sent down Adam, peace be upon him, [from Paradise] to the earth, Gabriel, peace be upon him, came to him and said, ‘O Adam, God Almighty has bestowed three qualities upon you, of which you should choose one and give up two.’ ‘What are they?’ Adam asked. Gabriel said, ‘Modesty, religiosity, and reason.’ Adam said, ‘God, I have chosen reason.’ So Gabriel, peace be upon him, said to modesty and religiosity, ‘Rise away.’ They said, ‘We will not.’ Gabriel, peace be upon him, asked, ‘Are you disobeying?’ They said, ‘No, but we have been commanded not to separate ourselves from reason, wherever it is.’”

He, may he be blessed and granted peace, said, “Don’t emulate someone who does not have the power to knot.”

He said, “God has not created any creature more lovable to Him than reason.”

It used to be said, “Reason is of two kinds: natural reason and experiential reason; both are needed and both lead to benefit.”

It used to be said, “Let no one be more lovable to you than a righteous minister who has ample reason and perfect manners, and who is experienced and knowledgeable about matters. If you obtain one, don’t lose him, for a man of reason will not withhold advice from you even when it is harsh.”

And it used to be said, “No act is lost on a man of instinctive reason.”

It used to be said, “Things with the most splendid origins and the sweetest fruits are: righteous deeds, good manners, and an active reason.”

And it used to be said, “Experiences have no end and a man of reason increases his stock of them.” The following verses of a poet confirm this:

Don’t you see that reason embellishes those who have it,
And that the perfection of reason is long experience.

In books of wisdom, it is written, “A man of reason does not let himself be deceived by the affection of a liar and does not have confidence in his advice.”

It is said, “Whoever misses out on reason and chivalry has ignorance for capital.”

It is also said, “Whoever reproaches others for a quality and accepts it for himself is stupidity personified.”

It used to be said, “A man of reason is always affectionate and a stupid man is quick to cut off relations.”

It used to be said, “The friend of every man is his reason, and his enemy is his ignorance.”

And it used to be said: “A vain man is obstinate, and a man of reason is wary of him. As for vanity, it is ignorance and pride.”

It was said, “The most likely man to pardon is the most able to punish; and the most deficient mind is that of a man who wrongs someone lower than him.”

It is said, “Nothing is more beautiful than a mind embellished by discernment, discernment embellished by learning, learning embellished by truth, truth embellished by action, and action embellished by kindness.”

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, used to say, “A man of reason is not someone who distinguishes good from evil, but rather someone who distinguishes between the lesser of two evils.”

And it is said, “A reasonable enemy is preferable to me than an ignorant friend.”

It used to be said, “Cling to a man of reason and generosity: become close to him and take care not to leave him if he is generous. Don’t worry about befriending a man of reason, although he is not generous, but beware of his disgraceful manners and benefit from his reason. Don’t break relations with a generous man, although you do not like his reason; benefit from his generosity and let your reason be of use to him. But by all means, flee from a stupid and miserly man.”

And it used to be said, “Breaking relations with a stupid man is as good as continuing relations with a man of reason.”

Al-Ḥasan said, “God Most High has never endowed a man with reason without rescuing him by it one day.”

A man from the tribe of Mujāshi‘ came to the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, and asked him, “O Messenger of God, am I not the best man of my people?” The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, replied, “If you have discernment, you’ll have merit; if you are pious, you’ll have religion; if you have wealth, you’ll enjoy high regard; and if you have morals, you’ll have virtuous manliness.”

Şafwān ibn Umayya and ʿUmar

A narrator said, “Şafwān ibn Umayya boasted to a man, saying, ‘I am Şafwān ibn Umayya, bravo!’ ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, heard of that and said, ‘Woe be you! If you have religion, you have esteem; if you have discernment, you have lineage; and if you have morals, you have virtuous manliness; otherwise, you are worse than a donkey.’”

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “A man’s nobility is his religion, his manliness is his reason, and his lineage is his morality.”

And he said, “God Almighty put reason in charge of deprivation and He put ignorance in charge of livelihood, so that a man of reason may learn and know that he has no possibility to control livelihood.”

Buzurjimihr said, “A reasonable man ought not to live in a country in which the following five are not present: a powerful ruler, a just judge, a thriving market, a running river, and a learned physician.”

He also said, “A reasonable man does not hope for what will cause him to be reprimanded for his hope, he does not ask for what he fears to be withheld, and he does not practice a profession that he has no capability to perform.”

A bedouin was asked, “What are the circumstances that best help the mind to become sharp and those that best help righteousness in one’s life?” He replied, “The best that can help sharpen the mind is learning, and the best that can help righteous living is contentment.”

He was asked about the best occasions for the mind to be tested and he replied, “When it is planning.”

He was asked, “Does a man of reason do anything that is not right?” He answered, “Not everything done by the permission of reason is right.”

He was asked, “What things best indicate the discernment of a man of reason?” He replied, “Good planning.” And he was asked, “What are the greatest benefits of reason?” He answered, “Avoiding sins.”

Buzurjimihr said, “The most vivacious of riding animals cannot do without a whip; the most chaste of women cannot do without a husband; and the most intelligent of men cannot do without consulting other men of intellect.”

A bedouin was asked about reason and when it can be recognized, and he said, “When your reason forbids you from doing what you ought not to do, you are a man of reason.”

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “Reason is a light in the heart by which we distinguish between truth and falsehood. It is by reason that what is permitted and what is forbidden were known, and it is by reason that the laws of Islam and the occasions to apply prescriptions were known, for God has made reason a light in His servants’ hearts that leads them to guidance and prevents them from death.”

It is because of the great value of reason that God Most High addressed only those who have reason. He, may He be Mighty and Sublime, said, “Only those possessed of reason will reflect.” [Q. 13:19] And He said, “So that he may warn whomsoever is living”, [Q. 36:70] that is, whomsoever has reason. And

He said, "Verily, therein is a reminder to him who has a heart", [Q. 50:37] that is, to him who has reason.

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, "A man of reason is forbearing toward him who does wrong, he abases himself to him who is below him [in rank], and he competes in righteousness with him who is above him [in rank]. When he sees an opportunity for doing good, he seizes it; and when temptation gets in his way, he holds fast to God and turns his back to it."

He also said, may God bless him and grant him peace, "The foundation of a human being is his reason; and whosoever has no reason has no religion."

If reason is the noblest of a man's precious things, and if his aspiration to seek virtues and his longing to achieve high ranks are commensurate with his firm mastery of it, the value of every man is indeed his reason, which is the ornament endearing him in the eyes of those looking at his merit.

‘Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad said:

Contemplate humankind with your eyes
And be one of those protected by their nobility.
The ornament of every young man is his graciousness,
And the value of every man is his reason.
In seeking high rank, don't depend
On a lineage of firm root,
For no young man can be graced by his family
With any quality, if his deeds contradict it.

It is said, "Reason is the perception of things in their realities; so if someone perceives a thing in its reality, his reason is perfect."

And it was said, "Reason is a man's mirror."

A poet took this idea and said:

This man's reason is a mirror,
In which you can see his deeds.
If there is rust on it,
It is because of ignorance.
If God polishes it well
And makes it clear for him,
It will give every living man
Who looks at it an exact image.

Another poet said:

You will never see me
Honor a wealthy man for his wealth.
No, and you shall not scorn someone
With me whose bad condition I understand.
I evaluate that one and this by their deeds.
I am like a mirror, and I meet
Each face and reflect its exact image.

However Time deals with me,
It finds me to be one of its men.

Another poet said:

When a man has no reason, he will be insignificant
Among people even if he is of noble descent.
But if he has reason, he will be honored for it.
And the best reason is that of one who is religious.

Another poet said:

If you were a man of reason but had no wealth,
You would be like a man who had a saddle but no mule;
And if you were a man of wealth but had no reason,
You would be like a man who had a mule but no saddle.

It is said, "The mind is the eye of the heart, so if a man has no mind, his heart is blind."

Ṣāliḥ ibn Janāḥ said:

Indeed, a man's mind is his heart's eyes;
If he has no mind, his heart doesn't see.

A philosopher said, "Passion is the snare of the mind."

ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muḥammad said, "If three qualities reside in a man even to the exclusion of others, he embodies refinement; and they are: soundness of mind, attachment to justice, and transcendence of passion."

Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Durayd said:

The bane of reason is passion, but whoever transcends
His passion by his reason is saved.

A wise man said, "God has not been worshiped by means of anything more lovable to Him than reason; and He has not been disobeyed by means of anything more lovable to Him than concealment."

Maslama ibn ʿAbd al-Malik said, "Whenever I read a book by anyone, I know his mind from it."

Yaḥyā ibn Khālīd said, "Three things indicate the minds of their sources: a book indicates the mind of its author, a messenger indicates the mind of the one who sent him, and a gift indicates the mind of its giver."

ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz and one of his assistants

ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz appointed a man to a post but he was told, "He is young and we don't think he is in good control of the post." So ʿUmar withdrew the appointment from him, saying, "I don't think you are in good control of your post because of your young age." The young man retorted:

A man's young age does not promote ignorance
Or blindness, so long as he is a man of reason.

ʿUmar said, "He is right." And he gave him back the appointment.
Jaththāma ibn Qays said, describing a reasonable man:

He has insight into the outcomes of matters
As if the consequences of each talked to him.

Another poet said in the same vein:

He has insight into the outcomes of matters
As if, with sound opinion, he sees what will happen.

Shabīb ibn Shayba said to Khālīd ibn Ṣafwān, "I know something which, if two persons share, will definitely lead to the success of their relations." "What is it?" asked Khālīd. "Reason," Ṣafwān replied, "for a reasonable man asks only for what is possible, and he is not denied what can be done." Khālīd commented, "You've announced my death to me, for I belong to a people among whom no one dies until he sees his successor."

ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Ḥusayn said to his son Muḥammad, "My son, even if a foolish man gives you advice, beware of him just as you beware of a wise man if he is an enemy of yours. The advice of a foolish man may perhaps involve you in an act of delusion, thus encompassing [even] you before the cunning of a wise man. Take care not to be hostile to any men, for there may be among them a cunning wise man of discernment or a foolish man of dogged opinion."

The Commander of the Faithful ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, blessings be upon him, said, "No wealth is more profitable than reason and no poverty is more pernicious than ignorance."

And it is said, "No manliness can abide in a man who has no reason."

A wise man said, "If any man could dispense with good manners, an intelligent man would [but he does not]. Whoever has no intelligence cannot benefit from good manners, just as only a man of noble qualities can benefit from the practice of good works and prayer."

It used to be said, "It is through intelligence that the pleasures of the world can be obtained, for an intelligent man makes an effort to achieve three things only: an advantage in livelihood, a benefit in the afterlife, and a pleasure in a permissible act."

A poet said:

When you love certain people, be close
To those of them who have reason and modesty.
For if virtues are compared,
Reason has no equal, indeed.

Muḥammad ibn Yazīd said:

The best of God's gifts to a man is reason;
 None of the other blessings approximates it.
 When the Compassionate perfects a man's reason,
 His morals and his purposes are thus perfected.
 A noble-hearted youth lives by reason among people;
 His learning and his experiences are in accord with reason.
 And whoever has the upper hand because of reason and bravery
 Is overcome by a man of fortune in matters of livelihood.
 The best quality of a youth is his sound reason
 Although his earnings may be limited;
 And the worst quality of a youth is his lack of reason
 Even if his origin and lineage may be noble.

A poet said:

One's mind commands decency and piety,
 And in it resides discernment, when it seeks residence.
 So, if you can, take through your virtue its highest merit:
 For men's minds are seen to have comparative merits.

Another poet said:

If evil traits are considered, avarice is the worst of them;
 And worse than avarice are promises that are not kept.
 There is no good in a mind if it is without wealth,
 And there is no good in a sheath if it is without a blade.
 When a man has a mind, his mind is the blade;
 And beside that, his person is only a redundancy.

Another poet said:

A man of reason represents to himself
 His misfortunes before they befall him,
 So that if they befall him of a sudden, they don't dismay him
 Because he had already represented them to himself.
 He had seen that one worry led to another,
 So he considered the last one first.
 But an ignorant man considers his days to be safe
 And forgets the downfall of bygone people.

Wisdom

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, "If a human being is sincere in his devotion to God for forty days, the fountains of wisdom will certainly rise from his heart to his tongue."

He also said, blessings and peace be upon him, "Wisdom is a believer's goal of persistent search; he takes it from whomever he hears possesses it and does not care from what vessel it issues."

He also said, blessings and peace be upon him, “Don’t offer wisdom to those who are not its deserving people and thus wrong it, and don’t withhold it from its deserving people and thus wrong them.”

Wise men said, “No man will seek wisdom if he has none.”

They also said, “If you find wisdom lying on the road, take it.”

In the Ḥadīth we read, “Take wisdom, even when conveyed by the tongues of polytheists.”

Ziyād said, “O people, let not the bad things you know about us stop you from benefiting by the best things you hear from us; for a poet said:

Do according to my teaching, even if I fall short in my actions.

My words will benefit you and my dereliction will not harm you.”

Wise sayings

Qass ibn Sā‘ida was asked, “What is the best kind of knowledge?” He replied, “Knowledge of oneself.” He was asked, “What is the best kind of learning?” He replied, “Stopping at the end limit of one’s learning.” He was asked, “What is the best kind of manliness?” He replied, “The preservation of one’s self-respect.”

Al-Ḥasan said, “Estimation is worth half one’s profit, slowness half one’s reason, and proficiency in seeking a needed object half one’s learning.”

It is said, “There is no mind as good as planning, no piety as good as abstention [from evil], no lineage as good as good character, and no wealth as good as being satisfied with God. And the most worthy patience with anything is patience with something one can never change.”

It is said, “The best element of righteousness is mercy, the beginning of love is unaffected friendliness, the beginning of recalcitrance is keeping secrets from near relatives, and the beginning of insight is correct supposition.”

It is also said, “Thinking is a light, heedlessness is darkness, foolish behavior is error, and learning is life; a first man has priority, a last one follows, and a happy man is one who is warned by another’s predicament.”

Ibn al-Zarib and Ḥumama meeting at a Ḥimyarite king’s council

Abū Ḥātim said that Abū ‘Ubayda related the following to him:

More than one well-informed person from the tribe of Hawāzin, some of whose fathers or grandfathers lived in the Jāhiliyya period [before Islam], related the following to me:

‘Amr ibn al-Zarib al-‘Adwānī and Ḥumama ibn Rāfi‘ al-Dawsī met at the palace of one of the kings of Ḥimyar. Genealogists claim that Laylā bint al-Zarib was the mother of Daws and that Zaynab bint al-Zarib was the mother of Thaqif, who was a Qaysite. The king said to them, “Ask questions of each other so that I may listen to what you will say.” ‘Amr asked Ḥumama, “To whom would you like to lend a helping hand?” Ḥumama replied, “To a pitiable penniless man, a

needy generous one, an indebted straitened one, and an oppressed weak one.” ‘Amr asked, “Who is the man most worthy of hatred?” Ḥumama replied, “A swaggering pauper, a weak braggart, and a loquacious man incapable of expressing himself.” ‘Amr asked, “Who is the man most worthy of preclusion from one’s giving?” Ḥumama replied, “An ungrateful miser, an envious beggar, and a begrudging demander.” ‘Amr asked, “Who is the man most worthy of being a protégé?” Ḥumama replied, “A man who thanks when given, excuses when denied giving, is forbearing when a promise of a gift is not fulfilled, and remembers a giver when a long time has passed.” ‘Amr asked, “Who is the most gracious man to be in intimate companionship with?” Ḥumama replied, “The one who gives generously when he is close, praises when he is far, forgives when he is oppressed, and is magnanimous when he is annoyed.” ‘Amr asked, “Who is the meanest of all men?” Ḥumama replied, “The one who grovels when he begs, withholds when he is begged, and scowls when he owns wealth; his appearance bespeaks greed and his interior filth.” ‘Amr asked, “And who is the most clement of all men?” Ḥumama replied, “The one who pardons when he has power, well-treats when he conquers, and is not made a tyrant by the might of victory.” ‘Amr asked, “And who is the most decisive of all men?” Ḥumama replied, “The one who takes matters in his hands, has consequences in view, and casts trepidation behind him.” ‘Amr asked, “And who is the most stupid of all men?” Ḥumama replied, “The one who courts danger, hazards a fall, and hastens to begin before becoming able to achieve.” ‘Amr asked, “Who is the most generous of all men?” Ḥumama replied, “The one who spends of what he has and is not distressed by what is normally expected.” ‘Amr asked, “Who is the most eloquent of all men?” Ḥumama replied, “The one who makes a distinguished idea clear by concise words and exactly hits the intended meaning.” ‘Amr asked, “Who of all men lives the most happily?” Ḥumama replied, “The one who is endowed with modesty, is satisfied with what he has, and transcends what he fears to what he does not fear.” ‘Amr asked, “And who is the most miserable of all men?” Ḥumama replied, “The one who envies others for blessings, is angry about his own lot, and feels regretful for missing what was not destined [for him].” ‘Amr asked, “Who is the richest of all men?” Ḥumama replied, “The one who is conscious of despair, is considerate of other people, regards small blessings as big ones, and is not angry about his own lot.” ‘Amr asked, “And who is the wisest of all men?” Ḥumama replied, “The one who is silent and ponders, who thinks and learns, and is warned and desists.” ‘Amr asked, “Who is the most ignorant of all men?” Ḥumama replied, “The one who thinks stupidity is a gain, and forgiveness a loss.”

Abū ‘Ubayda’s explanation of uncommon words used above

Abū ‘Ubayda said, “*Khalla* means need and *khulla* means friendship; a *kānīd* is the one who is ungrateful for a blessing, and a *kanūd* is an ungrateful man; a *mustamid* like a *mustamir* is a seeker of giving, and it is from the same root as

māʿida (a table with food) because it is spread out; *kanaʿa* means to scowl, and it is said *takannaʿa jilduhu* (his skin shriveled), that is, contracted, means that the man is close-fisted, a miser; *jashaʿ* means greed, the worse kind of miserliness; *tabaʿ* means filth; *iʿtisāf* means the risk of going forth without guidance, or doing something without knowledge; *mazīz* is taken from the saying, 'this is *amaz* (more distinguished) than that', that is, better than it and more abundant; a *muṭabbiq* sword is one which hits the joints exactly and does not go beyond them."

ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ said, "There are three things in which there should be no deliberation: doing a good deed, burying a dead person, and marrying a person of equal status."

He also said, "No regrets should be expressed for things done for the following three: God, Most Exalted, for what was done for Him; a thankful master for what was given to him; and a generous land for the seeds that were sown in it."

It was said, "Three things have no permanence: the shade of clouds, the friendship of evil persons, and insincere praise."

It was said, "Three things exist only in three things: wealth in the soul, honor in humility, and generosity in piety."

It was said, "Three men are known only in three circumstances: a courageous man is known only when one meets him, an honest man is known only in give-and-take situations, and brethren are known only in misfortunes."

It was said, "Whoever seeks three things can't be spared from three things: a man who seeks wealth by way of alchemy is not spared from bankruptcy, a man who seeks religion by way of philosophy is not spared from heresy, and a man who seeks jurisprudence by way of uncommon *ḥadīths* is not spared from hearing lies."

It was also said, "You should do three things: sit with the great, associate with the wise, and ask the learned."

ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, said, "The most fearful things I fear for you are: obeying your avarice, following your passion, and being self-conceited."

The learned of the Arabs and the Persians agreed on four maxims: don't induce your thinking to do what you can't bear, don't do a deed that does not benefit you, don't be deluded by a woman, and don't depend on wealth even when it is abundant."

Al-Riyāḥī said in his sermon at al-Mirbad [in Basra], "O Banū Riyāḥ: don't scorn a little thing from which you can learn, for I have learned cunning from the fox, imitation from the monkey, humbleness from the cat, readiness to help from the dog, and caution from the jackal; and I have learned night travel from the moon and intermittent appearance from the sun."

It was said, "A human being is the larger world in whom God has gathered the whole universe, for in him can be found the bravery of a lion, the patience of

a donkey, the greed of a pig, the caution of a crow, the cunning of a fox, the humbleness of a cat, the imitative ability of a monkey, and the cowardice of a nightingale.”

When Buzurjimihr was killed by Chosroës, the following was found written on his belt, “If betrayal among humans is natural, confidence in humans is a weakness; and if destiny is a truth, greed is an error; and if death is a constant watcher, peace of mind is a stupidity.”

Abū ‘Amr ibn al-‘Alā’ said, “Acquire what is good from good people and leave what is evil to evil people.”

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, said, “Don’t wear out the face of the earth, for its fat is in its face.”

And he said, “Sell an animal when it looks best in your eyes.”

He also said, “Disperse deaths: instead of having one animal, have two; and don’t remain in a house that causes you to be weak.”

It was said, “When a misfortune is old, condolence is abandoned; and when friendship is old, praise is loathsome.”

In a book from India, we read, “A sensible man ought to abandon seeking what cannot be achieved, otherwise he is considered ignorant and very much like a man who wants to navigate ships on land and roll wheels in the sea, which is impossible.”

It was said, “The good deed of a pernicious man is to refrain from harming you; and the harm of a beneficent man is to withhold from you his giving.”

Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said, “Restrain your selves, for they are curious, and renew them with [Qur’anic] remembrance; for they are readily oblivious. If you don’t restrain them, they lead you to the worst end.”

He says: *ḥādithūhā* = ‘renew them’ with wisdom, as a sword is renewed by polishing; for they are *sarī‘at al-duthūr* = ‘readily oblivious’: he means [like] the rust that spontaneously appears on the sword; and *iqda‘ūhā* = ‘restrain them,’ derived from *qada‘tu* = ‘I restrained’ the camel’s nose, that is, I hit it [with a spear or something else]; for they are *ṭula‘a* = ‘curious’: he means inquisitive about things.

Ardashīr ibn Bābak said, “Ears have a tendency to reject, and hearts to be bored. So separate one wise saying from the next [by intervening ideas], and that will make for recreation and concentration.”

Describing eloquence

‘Amr ibn ‘Ubayd was asked, “What is eloquence?” He answered, “It is what leads you to Paradise and turns you away from Hell.” “That’s not what I meant,” the enquirer said. “Then,” ‘Amr said, “it is what makes you see the occasions of your sensible conduct and the consequences of your error.” “That’s not what I meant,” the enquirer said. ‘Amr said, “Whoever does not know how to be silent does not know how to listen; and whoever does not know how to listen does not

know how to ask; and whoever does not know how to ask does not know how to speak.” The enquirer said, “That’s not what I meant.” ‘Amr said, “The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, ‘We, prophets, are reticent’ (*bikā*, plural of *bakā*, that is, men of few words). They used to dislike that a man’s speech be in excess of his ability to reason.” “That’s not what I meant,” the enquirer repeated. “Then,” ‘Amr said, “you seem to mean: the choice of words and making others understand well.” “Yes,” the enquirer agreed. ‘Amr then explained, “If you wish to establish God’s argument in the minds of persons who are legally obligated to observe the precepts of religion, and if you wish to alleviate the burden on listeners and embellish ideas in enquirers’ hearts by beautiful words in order to achieve their quick response and banish preoccupations from their hearts by exhortations from the Book and the Tradition – then you have achieved decisive discourse and have hit the mark.”

Someone was asked, “What is eloquence?” He replied, “Being able to distinguish between the need for junction and the need for disjunction [in rhetoric].”

Another was asked, “What is eloquence?” He replied, “Concision of wording, deletion of superfluity, and approximation of distant ideas.”

Another was asked, “What is eloquence?” He replied, “[Speech] in which the speaker is not ruined by the listener’s misunderstanding, and the listener is not ruined by the speaker’s unclear expression.”

Mu‘āwiya asked Ṣuḥār al-‘Abdī, “What is eloquence?” He replied, “That you answer without delay, and that you are right without error.” Then he added, “Help me, O Commander of the Faithful.” Mu‘āwiya said, “I will.” Ṣuḥār explained, “[Assure me] that you will not delay and that you will not be erroneous.”

Abū Ḥātim said, “He considered the first speech too long, so he asked to speak and gave a shorter speech.”

Khālīd ibn Ṣafwān heard a voluble man speak, so he said to him, “Know, may God have mercy on you, that eloquence does not consist in a loquacious tongue and abundant babble. It rather consists in hitting a right idea and offering a brief argument.” The man responded, “Abū Ṣafwān, there is no transgression [against another] greater than the one among people of the same craft.”

Rabī‘at al-Ra‘y spoke volubly one day and was pleased with what he had said. Near him was a bedouin, so he turned to him and asked, “What do you consider eloquence to be, O bedouin?” The man replied, “Fewness of words and conciseness of right ideas.” “What do you consider ineloquence to be?” Rabī‘a asked. The bedouin replied, “What you have been doing just now!” He struck him dumb as though he had put a stone in Rabī‘a’s mouth.

Some of what was proverbially said about the eloquence of a speaker is the following, “He hardly makes incisions and he hits the joint exactly.” The eloquent and concisely speaking man, whose words are few and who hits decisive ideas and meanings, is compared to a gentle butcher who hardly makes any incisions in the meat but hits the joints exactly.

A similar saying in verse is:

... He smears with tar the mangy spots.

That is, he says only what must be said and is like a kind person smearing [a camel] with tar only on the spots where there is mange. *Al-hinā* is tar, and *al-nuqb* is mange.

It is also said, "So-and-So *qarṭasa* [that is, shot an arrow] and hit the target," or "hit the eye of the *qirṭās* [that is, the bull's-eye]." All this is a way of saying a speaker spoke rightly and in concise words.

Al-ʿAttābī was asked, "What is eloquence?" He replied, "Showing clearly what the obscure elements of truth are, and portraying falsehood in the image of truth."

A bedouin was asked, "Who is the most eloquent of men?" He replied, "The one who uses the simplest words and has the best insight."

Another was asked, "What is eloquence?" He replied, "Increasing the words when they are too few for the meaning, and composing them well when they are numerous."

Another was asked, "What is eloquence?" He replied, "Countering an argument and achieving one's object."

Another was asked, "What is eloquence?" He replied, "Conciseness without being incapable and prolixity without being garrulous."

And another was asked, "What is eloquence?" He replied, "Saying little and keeping concision, as well as being right and having quick repartee."

A Greek man was asked, "What is eloquence?" He replied, "Making correct divisions and selection of words."

Someone was asked, "Who is the most eloquent of men?" He replied, "Whoever abandons superfluous words and is satisfied with conciseness."

It used to be said, "A man's messenger represents his opinion, and his letter represents his mind."

Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad, peace be on him, said, "An eloquent man is called eloquent [*baligh*] because he attains [*yablugh*] his object with the least effort."

A wise man was asked about eloquence and he said, "Whoever takes many ideas and expresses them in a few words, and takes a few ideas and creates of them many words is an eloquent person."

It was said, "Eloquence is the verse that can be rendered beautifully in prose, and the prose that can be rendered beautifully in verse."

It was said, "Eloquence is the speech that is beautiful when it is heard and concise when [its meaning is] perceived."

It was said, "Eloquence is a flashing glance indicating what is in the conscience."

Someone said, "When you are content with conciseness, loquacity denotes an incapability of expression; but conciseness is beautiful only when it conveys clear expression."

Someone else said:

The best speech has a few words indicating much, and
Incapability is a brief idea contained in many words.

One writer said, "Eloquence is the distinction between disjunction and junction, and the best speech is [qualified by] economy and achievement of meaning."

A poet said:

When you speak, don't be exuberant;
And be brief, for the best people are economical.

Another said:

No one who has the opportunity to speak
Is safe from being blamed or faulted.

And he said:

Time decreases and is long by turns,
And man is silent and speaks now and then.
Speech is various, if you study it,
Some of it is rejected and some accepted.

And he said:

When what is right is clear, don't abandon it;
For whenever you taste what is right,
You will realize it has coolness in the throat
Like the coolness of water when it is limpid and delightful.

Another poet said:

The aim of an eloquent man is not to speak
At great length, with elaboration and excess.
But his aim is rather to be subtle in expressing
An idea, and be of good delivery and reception.

Aspects of eloquence

Eloquence can be couched in four aspects [of expression]: it can be couched in words, writing, gestures, and allusions; each of these has a part in achieving eloquence and clear meaning, and each has a situation in which the others would not be adequate.

On this matter, it was said, "Every situation requires a manner of speaking; every speech has a response; and many a gesture is more eloquent than a word."

As for writing and gestures, they are understood by the elite and most of the common people. With regard to allusions, everything alluding to something

informs you about it, just as a wise man said, “[O God,] I testify that the heavens and the earth are signs that indicate, and witnesses that stand, each conveying Your argument and witnessing to Your Lordship.”

Another said, “Ask the earth, ‘Who planted your trees, dug your rivers, and reaped your fruits?’ If it does not answer you by a specific statement, it answers you by showing a moral lesson.”

A poet said:

I have gone to seek a helper for myself,
I have gone to the mountains and the seas.
The sea said to me when I came to it,
“How can a blind man help another blind man?”

Another poet said:

... His eye spoke about what was in his conscience.
Nuṣayb ibn Rabāḥ said:

They turned to you and praised you by what you deserved.
Had they remained silent, the [gift] pouches would have praised you.

He means: if they had remained silent, the pouches full of your gifts, packaged by the travelers, and carried by their camels would have praised you. This praise is conveyed by the allusion of the wording.

Ḥabīb said:

The encampment has spoken, but it does not say
By its oblivion that what is new will wear out.

This is so in old and in modern poetry, in new and in ancient speech; and it is abundant to the extent that it cannot be fully described or completely qualified.

A man asked al-ʿAttābī, “What is eloquence?” He answered, “Everyone who can transmit his need to you and make you understand his meaning without repeating, without having a speech defect, and without seeking help is an eloquent man.” He was told, “We understand repeating and having a speech defect, but what is the meaning of seeking help?” Al-ʿAttābī said, “If the man interrupts his speech by saying, ‘Listen to me,’ or ‘Understand me,’ or if he rubs his beard or twiddles his fingers or unnecessarily keeps turning around or pretending to clear his throat without having a cough or if he becomes breathless in his speech [– that is: ‘seeking help’].”

A poet said:

Constantly he is breathless, turns around, coughs,
Rubs his beard, and twiddles his fingers.

All these are signs of inability of self-expression.

Abrawiz said to his secretary, “Know that the props of speech are four; if a fifth is sought, none will be found; and if one of them is missing, they will not

be complete. They are: requesting a thing, asking about a thing, ordering a thing, and informing about a thing. So when you make a request, do it well; when you ask, be clear; when you order, be firm; and when you inform, be exact. And put all that you want to say in the fewest words.” He refers to speech in which words are few and meanings are many.

Rabī‘at al-Ra’y said, “When I hear speech devoid of embellishment, I adorn it and it becomes beautiful although I will not add anything to it and will not change its meaning.”

It was said, “The best speech is the one that needs no further speech.”

Yaḥyā said, “Speech is of many kinds and the best kind is the one which happens to have a successful speaker and whose listener benefits from it.”

Al-Ḥasan ibn Ja‘far said:

I wonder at an ineloquent man’s pride in himself [as he talks]
And at the silence of one who knows the truth better.
Silence is a shield to a person incapable of self-expression,
For speech is a man’s open door to his mind and inner self.

A bedouin described an eloquent man, saying, “It is as though tongues have been tamed and tied except to express affection for him and they can say nothing but praise his eloquence.”

Abū al-Wajīh described a man’s eloquence, saying, “By God, when he raises his tongue it is as though a she-camel in rut raises her tail for her male, and then he penetrates [listeners’ minds] with it as a serpent penetrates [the undergrowth].”

Arabs have wonderful accounts and amazing marvels of concise speech and subtle meaning, and we shall present a portion of them, God willing.

Accounts of eloquent statements

When Qutayba ibn Muslim came to Khurāsān as its governor, he announced, “Whoever has in his hand any of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Khāzim’s money, let him throw it away; and whoever has any of it in his mouth, let him spit it out; and whoever has any of it in his chest, let him exhale it.” The people were amazed at how beautifully he arranged [his words] in detail.

During Mu‘āwiya’s rule, Ibn al-Sammāl al-Asadī was asked, “In what condition were the people when you left them?” He replied, “When I left them, their condition ranged between a wronged person who could find no justice and a tyrant who had no compunction to deter him.”

Shabīb ibn Shayba was asked at the gate of al-Rashīd, may God Most High have mercy on him, “In what state did you see the people?” He replied, “I saw that the one who entered was hopeful and the one who came out was satisfied.”

Ḥassān ibn Thābit said the following about ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās:

If he speaks, he leaves no need for anyone to say anything
 In gleaned words that have any virtue for you to see.
 He suffices and heals the souls, and he does not leave room
 For any clever speaker to say more, in earnest or in jest.

Al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī, may God be pleased with both of them, met al-Farazdaq during a trip to Iraq and asked him about the people. "Their hearts are with you," al-Farazdaq replied, "their swords are against you, and victory is from heaven."

Mujāshiʿ al-Nahshālī said, "Truth has weight. Whoever reaches it will be satisfied, and whoever goes beyond it is an aggressor."

The Commander of the Faithful ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, peace be upon him, was asked, "What is the distance between the east and the west?" He replied, "The distance of a day's travel by the sun." He was then asked, "And what is the distance between heaven and earth?" He replied, "The distance of one hour's travel by a supplication that has been granted."

A bedouin was asked, "What is the distance between place X and place Y?" He replied, "The whiteness of a day and the blackness of a night."

Some people complained to Christ, peace be upon him, about their sins and he advised, "Leave them and they will be forgiven you."

ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, said, "Every human being's merit lies in what he can do well."

Khālīd ibn Yazīd ibn Muʿāwiya was asked, "What is the nearest thing?" He replied, "Death." He was asked, "And what is the farthest thing?" He replied, "Hope." He was asked, "What is the most desolate thing?" He replied, "A dead person." He was then asked, "And what is the most affable thing?" He replied, "An agreeable companion."

ʿAmr ibn ʿUbayd passed by a thief being waylaid by highway robbers, so he said, "The thief in secret has waylaid the thief in public."

Al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad was asked, "What is the matter with you: you narrate poetry [by others] but do not recite any of your own composition?" He said, "It is because I am like a grindstone: I sharpen but I do not cut."

ʿAqīl ibn ʿUllafa was asked, "Why don't you compose long poems of lampoon?" He replied, "Sufficient for you is a necklace that fits snugly around the neck."

Khālīd ibn Ṣafwān passed by a man crucified by the caliph, so he said, "Obedience planted him and disobedience reaped him."

A bedouin passed by a man crucified by the ruler, so he said, "Whoever divorces the world goes to his companion, the hereafter; and whoever departs from the truth will have the trunk [of a tree] as his mount."

Al-Nuʿmān and ʿAdī ibn Zayd

An example of speech by allusion is what al-ʿAbbās ibn al-Faraj al-Riyāshī narrated. He said, "Al-Nuʿmān ibn al-Mundhir, accompanied by ʿAdī ibn Zayd, camped in the shade of a leafy tree for the purpose of diverting himself. ʿAdī

said to him, 'May you not be cursed. Do you know what this tree is saying?' Al-Nu'mān asked, 'What is it saying?' 'Adi said:

Many a group of drinkers camped around us,
Who mixed their wine with pure cold water.
Anon, Time swept them away violently as in a storm.
Such is the doing of Time, over and over again.

"This spoiled the pleasure which al-Nu'mān was having."

Ibn al-A'rābī said, "I asked al-Faḍl, 'What is eloquence in your opinion?' He said, 'Deleting the surplus and bringing the distant closer.'"

A man said to Khālid ibn Ṣafwān, "You speak profusely." He said, "I speak profusely for two reasons, one of which is [to clarify] when a few words are not sufficient and the other is to exercise my tongue; restraining it would [eventually] make me unable to express myself."

Khālid ibn Ṣafwān used to say, "You will not be considered eloquent until you can speak to your black female slave in a pitch dark night about an important matter as you would speak of it in the gathering of your tribe."

The tongue is an organ of the body; if you exercise it, it becomes pliant; and if you don't, it becomes rigid and stutters. It is like your hand which you toughen by constant use, like your body which you strengthen by raising stones and similar things, and like your leg which you accustom to walk and it walks.

Nawfal and his wife

It was the custom of Nawfal ibn Musāḥiq to be silent whenever he entered the presence of his wife and to speak only after he left her. She said to him, "When you are with me, you fall silent; and when you are with others, you speak." He said, "I am too sublime for your delicate [sensibilities] and your delicacy overwhelms my sublime [thinking]."

Mentioning Khālid ibn Ṣafwān, Shabīb ibn Shayba said, "He has no friend in secret and no enemy in public."

The value of this kind of speech is only known by the people [who have learned] its craft.

A man described another, saying, "We came to him and he released his tongue as though it were the cloth whip of a game player."

Ma'n ibn Zā'ida entered the presence of al-Manṣūr, walking in small steps. "You've grown old," al-Manṣūr said. "In obedience to you," Ma'n responded. "But you are [still] strong and staunch, indeed," al-Manṣūr added, "Against your enemies," Ma'n quipped. "I see that there is still something left in you," al-Manṣūr said. "It is yours," Ma'n replied.

'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās was eloquent. Mu'āwiya said about him:

When he speaks, he leaves nothing unsaid. He doesn't stop hesitantly
Because of inability of expression, and his tongue utters no obscenities.

When he turns to a subject, he lets his tongue speak freely
Looking from side to side like a falcon.

Ṣaṣaʿa ibn Ṣawḥān spoke in the presence of Muʿāwiya and he grew sweaty. Muʿāwiya asked, “Has speaking left you breathless?” Ṣaṣaʿa retorted, “Noble race horses sweat abundantly.”

Ibn Sayāba wrote to ʿAmr ibn Bāna, “Time has frowned and wounded, it has aspired highly and become ungovernable, and it has perverted what is good; if you don’t help me to overcome it, it will expose me to shame.”

A man from the tribe of Ṭayyḥ praised a certain man’s speech, saying, “One is satisfied by the beginning of this speech and healed by its ending.”

A bedouin described a man, saying, “Your giving is good, your beneficence is evident, and [even] your withholding can be [considered] comfortable.”

Iyās ibn Muʿāwiya entered Syria when he was a boy and brought before one of [Caliph] ʿAbd al-Malik’s judges an opponent who was a very old man. The judge said to him, “Are you suing a very old man?” Iyās answered, “Truth is older than he is.” “Be quiet,” the judge ordered. “Who will present my case, then?” the boy asked. The judge said, “I don’t think you will be able to tell the truth until you grow older.” The boy said, “I testify that there is no god but God.” The judge then rose and went to see ʿAbd al-Malik and told him about the matter. The caliph said, “Fulfill his wish now and send him out of Syria lest he should stir up dissension against me among the people.”

Ibn al-Qirriyya’s following saying [in Arabic] is rhymed prose. He was invited to speak but words did not come to him, so he said, “The night conversation has been long, the moon has set, and the rain has fallen heavily, so what do I wait for?” A young man from the tribe of ʿAbd al-Qays answered him, saying, “Sleeplessness has been long and twilight has fallen, so let the one who can speak speak.”

A letter from ʿAmr ibn Masʿada to al-Maʿmūn

Aḥmad ibn Yūsuf, the secretary, said, “I entered the presence of al-Maʿmūn, and in his hand was a letter from ʿAmr ibn Masʿada. Heaving deep sighs as he looked at it, he stood up at one time and sat down at another. He did this several times then turned to me and said, ‘I suspect you are thinking about what you are seeing.’ ‘Yes,’ I said, ‘may God Most Exalted protect the Commander of the Faithful from adversities.’ ‘It is not an adversity,’ he explained, ‘but I have just read words similar to a report which [my father] al-Raṣīd spoke to me about; I heard him say to me: “Eloquence is bringing a far meaning close, distancing oneself from unnecessary filler words, and indicating with a few words that which is abundant.” I did not imagine that this would be possible in such a manner until I read this letter, which is an entreaty on behalf of the soldiers. It says:

[I write] my letter to the Commander of the Faithful, may God strengthen him, while the obedience and compliance of his soldiers and generals at my

end are at the best they can ever be among military men whose stipends have been delayed and whose conditions have deteriorated.’

“He then ordered that they be paid [their stipends] for eight months.”

Jaʿfar al-Barmakī signed a decree to his secretaries adding a brief note, saying, “If you are able to have all your letters in the form of signatures with a brief note, then do that.”

Hārūn al-Rashīd ordered Jaʿfar to remove his brother al-Faḍl from the [responsibility for the] Seal subtly and with kindness, and to take it himself. So Jaʿfar wrote to al-Faḍl, “The Commander of the Faithful has seen fit to transfer the Seal of his caliphate from your right hand to your left.” Al-Faḍl wrote back to him, “A benefaction coming to you for which you have been singled out to my exclusion is not one that has been taken away from me.”

Jaʿfar signed a man’s slip of paper, in which the man was disavowing an offense, and added the following brief note, “You had formerly performed an act of obedience and you had given a piece of sound advice, and between the two there was an act of improper bluntness; one bad act cannot overcome two good deeds.”

Al-Faḍl ibn Yaḥyā asked his father, “Why is it that we do favors to people and yet don’t see as much joy on their faces when they leave with our good deeds as we see on their faces when they leave with the good deeds of others?” Yaḥyā replied, “People’s hopes in us are greater than their hopes in others; and a human being only rejoices for what makes him realize his hope.”

Yaḥyā was asked, “What is generosity?” He replied, “A king in the clothing of a beggar.” He was asked, “What is tyranny?” He replied, “A beggar with the mischievous violence of a demon.” He was asked, “And what is liberality?” He replied, “Giving pardon after a display of power.”

Examples of al-Maʿmūn’s eloquence

Al-Maʿmūn was brought a man who had incurred punishment. As the man was being beaten, he said, “You have killed me, O Commander of the Faithful.” Al-Maʿmūn said, “Truth has killed you.” “Have mercy on me,” the man pleaded. Al-Maʿmūn said, “I cannot be more merciful than the One who decreed this punishment for you.”

Al-Maʿmūn asked ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir to do something and the latter hastened to do it. Al-Maʿmūn said to him, “God, Most Exalted, rejects the excuse of a hasty person because He has given him the capacity to verify the truth [first] and He will obligate someone who is uncertain to give evidence because He wants him to see the merit of deliberation.” ʿAbd Allāh asked, “Will you permit me to write this down, O Commander of the Faithful?” “Yes,” the caliph said, and ʿAbd Allāh wrote it down.

Al-Ma'mūn and Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī

Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī said, "Al-Ma'mūn asked me, 'Are you the black caliph?' I replied, 'You have granted me pardon, and the slave of Banū al-Ḥas-ḥās says:

When boasting, the poems of Banū al-Ḥas-ḥās's slave
Stand for him in the place of lineage and wealth.
If I am a slave, my soul is free due to generosity
Or if I am black-skinned, I am of white character.'

"Al-Ma'mūn said, 'Uncle, jesting has led you to serious talk.' Then he recited:

Blackness does not belittle a gallant man
Nor does it belittle a refined, intelligent young man.
If blackness has a share of you,
My share of you is your white morals.

"Al-Ma'mūn said, 'Of the sayings of the wise, I like: "Generosity is spending what one has, and avarice is denying the blessings of the Worshipped One, may He be exalted."'"

Zubayda's eloquence

Umm Ja'far Zubayda bint Ja'far said to al-Ma'mūn when she entered his presence after the murder of her son, "Praise be to God who spared you for me when I was bereaved of my son, for I am not bereaved of a son when you are a substitute for him." When she had left, al-Ma'mūn said to Aḥmad ibn Abī Khālid, "I would never have thought women were created with such patience and fortitude."

Abū Ja'far said to 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd, "Help me with your friends, O Abū 'Uthmān." 'Amr said, "Raise the banner of truth and its people will follow you."

The banes of eloquence**Abū Dāwūd al-Iyādī**

Muḥammad ibn Maṣṣūr, the secretary of Ibrāhīm, was a poet, a transmitter of poetry, and a scholarly student of grammar. He said, "I heard Abū Dāwūd say when speeches and appreciation of language were mentioned, 'Condensation of meanings is an [act of] kindness, use of uncommon words is a weakness, speaking affectedly in an amplified tone is a defect unless it is real bedouin speech, focusing on other people's faults is a sign of inability of self-expression, touching one's beard is a mark of total loss, and breaking the rules of language construction is a long-winded prolixity.'"

"And I heard him say, 'The first element of oratory is natural disposition, its mainstay is exercise and training, the two wings [that bear it up] are learning

language inherited from others, its ornament is correct grammatical inflection, its beauty is the choice of words, and what makes it loved is associated with having an aversion [to contrary elements].’”

“And he recited the following verse about the orators of Iyād:

They hint with hidden words and sometimes
They serve as a revelation to someone observing
and seeking to evade the watchful censors.

Al-Faḍl on concision

Ibn al-Aʿrābī said, “I asked al-Faḍl, ‘What is concision in your opinion?’ He said, ‘Deleting the surplus and bringing the distant [meaning] closer to comprehension.’”

Ibn al-Sammāk spoke one day when a maid of his was listening [indoors]. When he entered, he asked her, “What do you think of my words which you have just heard?” She replied, “How beautiful they were, except that you often repeated them!” He said, “I [usually] repeat them so that they may be understood by the one who has not understood them.” She remarked, “By the time they are understood by the one who has not understood them, the one who has understood them will be bored with them.”

A section on forbearance and repelling an evil deed with a good one

God Most High said, “A good deed and an evil deed are not equal. Repel with that which is better and behold, he between whom and you is an enmity will become as if he were a warm friend. But none shall receive it except those who are steadfast; and none shall receive it except a man of great fortune.” [Q. 41:34–35]

A man said to ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ, “By God, I will free myself to deal with you!” ‘Amr retorted, “Now that will make you busy!” The man said, “It is as if you are threatening me. By God, if you say a word to me, I will say ten to you.” ‘Amr replied, “And by God, if you say ten words to me, I will not say a single one to you.”

A man said to Abū Bakr, may God be pleased with him, “By God, I will revile you in such a vicious manner that it will go to the grave with you.” Abū Bakr replied, “It will go with you, not with me.”

‘Amr ibn ‘Ubayd was told, “Abū Ayyūb al-Sikhtiyānī attacked you so abominably today that we pitied you.” He said, “It’s him you should pity.”

A man vilified al-Sha‘bī, so the latter said, “If you are truthful [in what you said about me], may God forgive me; and if you are lying, may God forgive you.”

A man vilified Abū Dharr [al-Ghifārī], so the latter said, “Don’t be excessive in vilifying us, man, and leave room for reconciliation; for we don’t requite those who disobey God regarding us with more than obeying God regarding him.”

Christ, the son of Mary, blessing and peace be on him, passed by a group of Jews. They said evil things to him but he responded with good words. He was told, “They say evil things and you respond to them with good words!” He said, “Everyone spends of what he has.”

A poet said:

‘Amr defamed me and I defamed him; and so
The defamed and the defamer were considered sinful.
I said good things to him and he said obscenities:
Each was lying about his friend.

Another poet said:

I blunted the grudge of a blood relative
By my forbearance, when he had none.
When I asked him to preserve relations of kinship,
He sought to break them; that indeed is stupidity and sin.

I treated him with forbearance, for a man is able
To control his arrow as long as it is still in his hand.

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, "No man drinks a drink in the world more lovable to God than a draught of anger that he requites with forbearance, or a draught of disaster that he requites with fortitude."

A man wrote to a friend of his who, he heard, had attacked him:

I was displeased that you have spoken ill of me,
But I was pleased that I have crossed your mind.

Ṭāhir ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz recited the following verses:

If a friend of mine acts meanly toward me once,
Having earlier acted decently and been nice to me,
I bear the offense that he has committed so that
The latter act may not invalidate the former one.

Describing forbearance and its uses

The forbearance of al-Aḥnaf

Al-Aḥnaf was asked, "From whom have you learned forbearance?" He said, "From Qays ibn ʿĀṣim al-Minqarī. I saw him sitting on the floor in the courtyard of his house, with the baldric of his sword wrapped around his knees and talking to his people, when a shackled man was brought in together with a murdered man. 'This is your brother's son,' he was told, 'and he has killed your son.' By God, al-Aḥnaf did not change his sitting position and did not interrupt his talk; he then turned to his brother's son and said, 'My nephew, you have sinned against your Lord, you shot yourself with your own arrow, and you killed your cousin.' Turning to another son of his, he said, 'Get up, son, and bury your brother; unshackle your cousin and take one hundred she-camels to his mother as blood-money for her son, for she is a stranger.' Then he recited these verses:

I am a man whose noble descent is not adulterated
With a blemish or a folly that impairs it.
I am from Minqar, from a house of noble deeds:
A branch with others growing round it.
They are orators, when one of them speaks;
They are white-faced, virtuous, and eloquent.
They don't give heed to their neighbor's fault
But to protecting his neighborliness they give heed."

A man said to al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays, "Teach me forbearance, O Abū Baḥr." Al-Aḥnaf said, "It is [constant] humility, O son of my brother. Can you tolerate that?"

Al-Aḥnaf said, "I am not [naturally] forbearing but I constrain myself to be forbearing."

He was asked, "Who is more forbearing, you or Mu'āwiya?" "By God," he said, "I have not seen more ignorant people than you. Mu'āwiya has power so he is forbearing; whereas I am forbearing and have no power. How can I be compared to him or be close to him?"

Hishām ibn 'Abd al-Malik asked Khālīd ibn Ṣafwān, "By what means has al-Aḥnaf reached among you the position he has reached?" Khālīd replied, "If you wish, I'll tell you about one quality; if you wish, I'll tell you about two; and if you wish, I'll tell you about three?" Hishām asked, "What is the one quality?" Khālīd said, "He was the strongest of all people in controlling himself." "And what are the two qualities?" asked Hishām. Khālīd said, "He was guarded against evil and adductive of good." "And what are the three?" Hishām asked. Khālīd said, "He would not allow himself to be provoked, he did not oppress, and he was not miserly."

Qays ibn 'Āṣim was asked, "What is forbearance?" He replied, "That you keep good relations with the one who breaks them with you, that you give to the one who deprives you, and that you pardon the one who wrongs you."

It was said, "There is nothing associated with another thing more beautiful than forbearance associated with learning, and pardon associated with power."

Luqmān, the wise man, said, "There are three [persons] whom you will really know in only three [situations]: you will only know a forbearing person in [a situation] of anger, a courageous man only in [a situation] of war, and your brother only when you need him."

A poet said:

Forbearing persons are not [known] in situations of contentment
But rather in [situations] of anger.

In the Ḥadīth, we read, "The closest a man can be to God's anger is when he becomes angry."

Al-Ḥasan said, "A believer is forbearing and does not behave irrationally, even if others behave irrationally with him." He cited the saying of God, Most High, "And when the ignorant address them, they say, 'Peace.'" [Q. 25:63]

Mu'āwiya said, "I am ashamed before my Lord of having an offense greater than my pardon, an irrational behavior greater than my forbearance, or a pudendum I don't cover up."

Mu'arriq al-ʿIjlī said, "I have never said in anger a word that I would regret after having calmed down."

Yazīd ibn Abī Ḥabīb said, "My anger is in my sandals. When I hear something I resent, I take my sandals and walk away."

It was said, "When a man becomes angry, he should lie on his back. If he cannot speak, he should move his legs in alternate movements."

Al-Aḥnaf was asked, "What is forbearance?" He said, "It is speech if there is no [need for] action, and silence if speech is harmful."

ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, said, "He whose speech is kind must be loved."

He also said, "If you are forbearing toward a foolish person, your supporters against him will increase."

Al-Aḥnaf said, "Whosoever cannot bear one word calmly will hear many."

He also said, "Many a time have I swallowed my anger fearing what would be worse." And he recited:

I have accepted some humiliation, fearing more of it;
For one evil is easier [to bear] than some others.

ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz was told something he resented, so he said, "Don't worry. You wanted the devil to provoke me by stirring up [my sense of] the dignity of my power so that I would do to you today the harm you would receive from me tomorrow. Go away, if you like."

A poet said the following verses on this idea:

No people shall achieve glory, noble as they may be,
Until they are humbled by others despite their power,
And until they are reviled and their faces change color,
Not out of the humiliation of weakness but that of forbearing men.

Another poet said:

If an untoward word was said, he would overlook it as if he were
Cowering, though not humiliated; if he wished he would defend himself.

One of the most beautiful verses on forbearance is Kaʿb ibn Zuhayr's:

If you do not look away from impudence and obscenity,
You will hit a forbearing man or will be hit by a foolish one.

Al-Aḥnaf said, "The bane of forbearance is being humbled."

And he said, "A man who encounters no foolish persons never learns forbearance."

He also said, "Whenever the foolish are few, their people are [easily] humbled." And he recited:

To achieve domination, lances are inevitably needed
As well as men with unsheathed weapons
Who will defend it with their hands;
But also, they need foolish men with constant barking.

Al-Nābigha al-Jaʿdī said:

Forbearance is useless if it does not have
The impulse to protect its purity from turbid intrusions;

And foolishness is useless if it does not have
A forbearing man who can execute what he orders.

When al-Nābigha recited these verses to the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, the latter said, “Well said, may God preserve your mouth.” So the poet lived one hundred and seventy years and none of his incisors was [ever] broken.

It was said, “Forbearance is only manifested in situations of victory, just as pardon is only manifested in situations of power.”

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, “I heard an Arabian bedouin say, ‘Sinān ibn Abī Ḥāritha was more forbearing than the chick of a bird.’ I asked, ‘And what is the extent of a chick’s forbearance?’ He said, ‘It comes out of its egg on the top of a mountain and does not move until its feathers become abundant and it is capable of flying.’”

Al-Ashnandānī said:

In leniency there is weakness, and in petulance awe,
And whoever is not feared encounters difficulties.
Poverty is better than wealth with meanness,
And death is better than a life of humiliation.
Forbearance does not benefit the forbearing at all times,
Nor is foolishness bad in all circumstances when patiently met.
I am not crude with anyone who is kind to me,
But I am crude and disdainful with anyone who is coercive.

Another poet said, praising forbearance:

I see that the consequences of forbearance are praiseworthy,
And that foolishness has ruined many peoples.

A poet of the past said:

Don’t you see that forbearance is an embellishment that gives
Leadership to a person, and that foolishness dishonors him?
Bury foolishness by exercising forbearance, and you will rest
From foolishness: forbearance is the death of foolishness.

Another poet said:

Indeed, the greatest ascription that a noble man
Can boast about, when vying with others, is forbearance.
O Lord, grant me forbearance from You
For I see no forbearing man who regrets his forbearance.

A wise man said, “Nothing is sweeter to me than an anger I swallow.”

Another said:

Forbearance deters a foolish man from doing harm,
But foolishness is an enticement; so don’t be foolish.
For you will regret when no regret will be of any avail,
As a defrauded man regrets when he leaves [the swindler].

‘Alī, peace be with him, said, “The first reward of a forbearing man for his forbearance is that people are his supporters against a foolish man.”

Kisrā Anūshirwān was asked, “How much is forbearance worth?” He answered, “How can you know the worth of anything whose perfection no one has seen?”

Mu‘āwiya asked Khālīd ibn al-Mu‘ammar, “Why do you love ‘Alī ibn Abi Tālib, peace be on him?” Khālīd said, “I love him for three qualities: for his forbearance when he is angry, for his truthfulness when he speaks, and for his fulfillment when he promises.”

It used to be said, “There are three qualities which, when they exist in a person, complement his faith: when he gets angry, his anger does not carry him away from the truth; when he is satisfied, his satisfaction does not carry him away to injustice and wrong; and when he has power, he does not take what does not belong to him.”

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, said, “When you hear a word that hurts you, bow your head to it until it has passed over you.”

Al-Ḥasan said, “Forbearance is known only in situations of anger: if you haven’t become angry, you will not have [had the opportunity to be] forbearing.”

A poet said:

Forbearance is not considered a man’s quality when he is content
 If, when angry, he does not exercise forbearance:
 Just as generosity is not considered a man’s quality when he is rich
 If, when straitened, he does not bear his hardship.

A wise man said, “The best quality you should like to have is forbearance. If you are not forbearing, adopt forbearance; for when a man attempts to imitate others, he often becomes one of them.”

Someone said, “Forbearance is a good scheme of action against an impudent person; for whenever you ignore an impudent person and belittle his deed, you humiliate him.”

It is said, “A forbearing man is not one who is wronged, so he forbears until such a time when he acquires power and then takes vengeance; a forbearing man is rather one who is wronged, so he forbears then when he acquires power he forgives.”

Al-Aḥnaf (or someone else) said:

A forbearing man may perhaps laugh when hurt,
 While his heart is moaning from ardent anger;
 A forbearing man may perhaps bridle his tongue
 Because he is wary of an answer, when in fact he is eloquent.

It was said, “When two men revile each other, the meaner one triumphs.”

Al-Aḥnaf said, “I found that forbearance is a better supporter to me than men.”

Someone said, "Beware of the might of anger, for it leads you to the humiliation of apology."

And it was said, "Whosoever forbears gains ascendancy, and whosoever tries to understand will find increase."

Al-Aḥnaf said, "Whenever someone has a dispute with me, I prevail by one of three ways: if he is above me [socially], I will have recognized his standing; if he is below me [socially], I will have respected myself by not descending to his level; and if he is my equal [socially], I will have been gracious to him."

The poet who took this idea and put it in verse has done well, saying:

If the one whose impudence afflicts me is lower,
I decline to enter a fight with him in impudence;
If he is my equal and has committed a slip,
I resort to forgiveness and add it to our equality;
And if I am below him in social standing and status,
I recognize his right to priority and precedence.

Another poet likewise said:

I will force myself to pardon every offender,
Even if his offenses against me are numerous.
For people are of three kinds:
A nobleman, a man of low class, and a contending equal.
As for the one who is above me, I will recognize his merit
And follow justice in his regard, as long as justice stands;
As for the one who is below me, I will preserve my honor
By not responding to his abuse, even if I'll be blamed for that;
And as for the one who is my equal, I will be gracious to him
If he slips or errs, for graciousness to a free man is required.

Aṣṣram ibn Qays said (and it is said 'Alī, peace be on him, said it):

I turn a deaf ear to words inciting grudges
And I forbear, for to me forbearance is more likely.
I disregard most of the words
Lest I be answered with what I dislike.
If I attract to myself the impudence of an impudent man,
I am the one who is more impudent.
Don't be deceived by the appearance of men
And the words they embellish or falsify to you.
Many a young man with good words and a handsome face
Pleases those who look at him, and yet
He lies asleep when good deeds are required
But, when vileness comes, he wakes up.

Al-Ḥasan ibn Rajāʾ said:

I love noble deeds as much as I can,
 And I dislike to answer [abuse] and be answered.
 I forgive people's insults out of forbearance, for
 It is the most evil of men who love vituperation.
 He who holds other men in awe will be looked at with awe,
 But he who mocks other men will not be feared.
 Wrong is he in favor of whose rights men pass judgment
 And who does not pass judgment in favor of others' rights.

Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī, may God be pleased with both, said, “Whosoever is forbearing protects his honor; whosoever gives generously is lauded; whosoever takes good care of his property becomes rich; whosoever endures adversity multiplies his good qualities; whosoever is patient is praised; whosoever suppresses his anger will become of widespread beneficence; whosoever pardons offenses will have his good deeds increased; and whosoever fears God will be spared what worries him.”

ʿAlī and a Persian magnate

The Commander of the Faithful, ʿAlī, peace be on him, asked one of the magnates of Persia, “What was the most praiseworthy thing about your kings in your opinion?” He said, “Ardashīr had the merit of priority in establishing the empire, but the most praiseworthy one as to his life’s achievements was Anūshīrwān.” The Commander of the Faithful asked, “What of his characteristics was the most prominent in him?” The magnate said, “Forbearance and patience.” The Commander of the Faithful commented, “They are twins, the product of a high-minded aspiration.”

Maḥmūd ibn al-Ḥasan al-Warrāq said:

I have granted my injustice to the one who wronged me,
 And I have forgiven his wrong-doing knowingly.
 He has thus bestowed on me a good deed when,
 In his ignorance, he clearly showed my forbearance.
 His misdeed bounced back on him, and
 My good deed bounced back on me in double profit.
 I have become a man deserving reward and praise,
 And he has become one who acquired injustice and sin.
 It is as if the good deed was his,
 And I was the one who wronged him.
 He continues to wrong me, and I to have mercy on him
 Until I pitied him for his injustice.

Muḥammad ibn Ziyād said, praising forbearing men:

We think they, among men, are deaf to obscenities,
 Dumb to abomination when exchanging unseemly talk,
 And sick when met, because of their bashfulness and decency;

But they are like lions crouching in their dens, when defense calls.
It is as if they have a stain whose shame they fear,
Yet that is nothing but their way to avert being accused of faults.

The following verses were said by him also:

I raise myself above other selves, and
I often humble myself in honoring them.
But if a mean man ever wants to hurt me by his foolishness,
God will not want me to accept meanness as an honorable trait.

Wahb said, “It is written in the Gospel that no ruler should be unjust when justice ought rather to be sought from him, nor should he be foolish when forbearance ought rather to be inspired by him.”

A poet said:

If someone you love consults you, tell him,
“Obey a forbearing man if he forbids you something,
And know that you will never prevail and
See the paths of guidance if you obey your passion.”

Another poet said:

Be a source of forbearance and forgive injury,
For you’ll see [the result of] what you’ve done and you’ll hear.
And when you love, love closely
For you don’t know when you’ll be separating;
And when you dislike, dislike not with a cut-off
For you don’t know when you’ll return.

A section on having dominion

‘Adī ibn Ḥātim was asked, “What is dominion?” He said, “It is being an overlord who is foolish with his wealth and humble with regard to his honor, and one who repudiates his rancor.”

Qays ibn ‘Āṣim was asked, “For which of your qualities have your people made you their overlord?” He said, “For abstaining from harm, giving generously, and helping friends.”

A man asked al-Aḥnaf, “For which of your qualities have your people made you their overlord when you are neither the noblest of them by descent, nor the most handsome in looks, nor the most perfect in natural disposition?” He answered, “For a quality contrary to the one you have, my dear nephew.” The man asked, “And what is it?” Al-Aḥnaf answered, “It is leaving aside matters of yours that don’t concern me, which is unlike your concern with matters of mine that don’t concern you.”

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, asked a man, “Who is the chieftain of your people?” The man said, “I am.” “You are lying,” ‘Umar said, “for if you were, you wouldn’t have said so.”

Aws and Ḥātim in front of al-Nu‘mān

Ibn al-Kalbī said:

Aws ibn Hāritha ibn La‘m al-Ṭā‘ī and Ḥātim ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Ṭā‘ī went to see al-Nu‘mān ibn al-Mundhir. The latter asked Iyās ibn Qabiṣa al-Ṭā‘ī, “Which of them is better?” Iyās answered, “May you never be cursed, O king! I am one of them [a Ṭā‘ī]. Ask them about themselves, and they will tell you.” Aws then entered the presence of al-Nu‘mān, and the latter asked him, “Are you better than Ḥātim, or is he better than you?” “May you never be cursed,” answered Aws, “the least of Ḥātim’s children is better than I am. If my children, my wealth, and I belonged to Ḥātim, he would have given us away in one single morning.” Ḥātim then entered the presence of al-Nu‘mān, and the latter asked him, “Are you better than Aws, or is he better than you?” “May you never be cursed,” answered Ḥātim, “the least of Aws’s children is better than I am.” Thereupon al-Nu‘mān said, “This, by God, is dominion.” And he ordered that each of them be given one hundred camels.

‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān asked Rawḥ ibn Zinbā‘ about Mālīk ibn Misma‘, and the latter said, “If Mālīk gets angry, one hundred thousand swords get angry with him, and none of them asks, ‘Why are you angry?’” ‘Abd al-Malik commented, “This, by God, is dominion.”

Abū Sufyān and the slaughter camels of the king of Yemen

Abū Ḥātim related the following on the authority of al-ʿUtbi:

The king of Yemen sent seven slaughter camels as a present to Mecca and directed that they be slaughtered by the most powerful Qurayshite man in the city. They arrived when Abū Sufyān had just wedded Hind. So she said to him, “O my man, let not women distract you from performing this honorable deed, to which another man may precede you.” “O my woman,” he responded, “let your husband do what he chooses for himself. By God, if any man slaughters them, I will slaughter him!” The camels remained tethered until Abū Sufyān went out to them after the seventh day [following the wedding] and slaughtered them.”

A saying by Hind about her son Muʿāwiya

When Muʿāwiya was a little boy, a man saw him and said, “I think this boy will become the chief of his people.” Muʿāwiya’s mother heard him and said, “May I be bereaved of him, then, if he will be the chief of his people only.”

Al-Haytham ibn ʿAdī said, “It used to be said, ‘If a boy has a flowing lock of front hair, a long foreskin, and a well-wrapped mantle, he will one whose [later] dominion is undoubted.’”

Ḍamra ibn Ḍamra, who was very ugly, entered the presence of al-Nuʿmān ibn al-Mundhir. Al-Nuʿmān turned to his companions and said, “It is better for you to hear of al-Muʿaydī than to see him.” Ḍamra retorted, “O king, a man is valued by his two smallest organs: his heart and his tongue. When he speaks, he speaks with eloquence; and when he fights, he fights with heart.” Al-Nuʿmān agreed, “You are right, and your people have rightly given you dominion.”

ʿArāba al-Awsī was asked, “For what qualities have your people made you their chieftain?” He answered, “For four qualities: I generously give them of my wealth, I humble myself to them with regard to my honor, I don’t scorn their least, and I don’t envy their elder.”

Al-Shammākh ibn Ḍirār said the following verses about al-Awsī:

I have seen ʿArāba al-Awsī rise
Unrivalled to the best [positions].
When a flag is raised for a glorious deed,
ʿArāba receives it with his right arm.

It was said, “A man becomes a chief because of four things: his mind, his manners, his learning, and his wealth.”

Salm ibn Nawfal was the chieftain of the Kināna tribe. A man attacked his son and nephew and wounded them, so he was brought to Salm, who asked him, “What made you think you’ll be safe from my revenge?” The man said, “We have given you dominion over us [because we knew] you would suppress your anger, treat the foolish with clemency, and forbear an evil deed.” So Salm released the man, and a poet said:

Some people are made chiefs but are not the stuff of chiefs.
The [deserving] valiant chief is rather Salm ibn Nawfal.

Ibn al-Kalbī said, “Khālīd al-ʿAnbarī asked me, ‘What do you consider dominion to be?’ I said, ‘During the Jāhiliyya period, it was the chiefdom of a tribe, but in Islam it is the governorship of a province; yet better than either is piety.’ He said, ‘You are right. My father used to say, “Former people reached high place only by reason, and latter people reached it only by the same means as the former people.”’ I said, ‘Your father was right. Al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays became a chief by his clemency, Mālīk ibn Mismaʿ by the love of his clan for him, Qutayba ibn Muslim by his cunning, and al-Muhallab by all these qualities.’”

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, “An Arab bedouin named Muntajīʿ ibn Nabḥān was asked, ‘What is a *samaydaʿ*?’ He said, ‘A chief whose protection is readily secured.’”

During his caliphate, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb used to have a cushion spread out for him, and nobody [else] sat on it but al-ʿAbbās ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib and Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb.

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said to Abū Sufyān, “All the hunt is in the belly of a *faraʿ*.” A *faraʿ* (pronounced with a *hamza*, and the plural is *firaʿ*) is a wild donkey. The meaning is that, among men, he is like a wild donkey among wild beasts.

ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ’s opinion of his brother Hishām

On entering Mecca, ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ saw a group of people from the tribe of Quraysh gathered in a circle. When they saw him, they cast their eyes upon him. He said, “I think you have been talking about me.” They said, “Yes. We have been comparing you with your brother Hishām, and wondering who is the better one of you two.” ʿAmr said, “Hishām is in four ways better than I: his mother is Hishām ibn al-Mughīra’s daughter, while my mother is one whom you all know; his father loved him among all people more than he loved me, and you know how a father knows his son; he adopted Islam before I did; and he died as a martyr, and I am still alive.”

When Qays ibn ʿĀṣim was dying, he said to his sons, “Sons, keep what I am telling you, for no one can be a better adviser to you than myself. When I die, let your elders be chiefs and not your young ones, lest people should scorn your elders.”

Al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays said, “Dominion [*sūdād*] is accompanied by *sawād*.” This saying has two possible explanations: one of them is that by *sawād* he meant the blackness of one’s hair, for if someone does not achieve dominion in his youth, he will not achieve it in old age; the other explanation is that by *sawād* he meant the common people, the masses, and thus he meant that if someone’s name does not become common on the tongues of the populace as having dominion, he does not benefit by his fame with the elite.

Abān ibn Maslama said:

We are not like people whose dominion is new,
 Whose wealth is seen but whose deeds are not perceived.
 Their efforts are limited to their own people, while ours
 Are such that all the tribes of Dhubyān are our dependents.

Ibn ʿUyayna after the death of his peers

Al-Haytham ibn ʿAdi said, “When the scholarly peers of Sufyān ibn ʿUyayna died and he remained alone, people vied with one another in decrying his merit, so he said:

The country is now empty, so I have unauthorized dominion.
 It is misery to be alone in my dominion.”

A man’s dominion resides in himself

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “Whoever is quick to do [a good deed] will not have his noble descent delayed; and whoever is late to do [a good deed] will not have his noble descent quickened.”

Quss ibn Sāʿida said, “He who has no nobility within himself will not benefit by his father’s.”

It was said, “People are judged by their physical acts.”

A poet said:

ʿIṣām’s spirit is what made him a chief
 And taught him how to attack and be bold.

ʿAbd Allāh ibn Muʿāwiya said:

Although our ancestors were noble,
 We have never depended on our noble descent.
 We build up as our ancestors did
 And, as they did, we continue to do.

Quss ibn Sāʿida said, “Let me pronounce judgment among the Arabs on an issue that nobody before me has done and that nobody after me will undo: Any man who accuses another of a blameworthy deed preceded by an honorable one shall not bear any blame; and any man who claims an honorable deed preceded by a dishonorable one shall not earn any honor.”

ʿĀʾisha, may God be pleased with her, said, “Any honorable deed on the far side of which is a dishonorable one should more appropriately be considered a dishonor; and any dishonorable deed preceded by an honorable one should more appropriately be considered an honor.” She means that a man’s qualities should more appropriately be his own; if he is honorable and his forefathers were dishonorable, this should not harm him; and if he is dishonorable and his forefathers were honorable, this should not benefit him.

‘Āmir ibn al-Ṭufayl of the tribe of ‘Āmir said:

Although I am the son of ‘Āmir’s chief
 And its famous knight in every event,
 ‘Āmir has not made me a chief by lineage—
 God forbid that I rise by a grandfather’s or a father’s deed.
 I rather defend its homeland and protect it
 From harm, and I attack anyone who attacks it.

A man went to greatest lengths in a speech before ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān, and the latter liked what he had heard from him, so he asked him, “Whose son are you?” The man said, “O Commander of the Faithful, I am the son of my own self through which I have reached you.” The caliph said, “You are right.”

A poet adopted this idea and said:

My wealth is my mind, and my ambition my nobility.
 I am not a client to anyone, nor am I an Arab [tribesman].
 If a person has to be affiliated to another,
 I will affiliate myself only to my good manners.

A recent poet said:

I see that the men who are sons of Dāliq
 Are kings by virtue of their fostering trade,
 While our barbarians [sit lazily] by their walls,
 And talk at length about their dead.
 People are only judged by their physical acts,
 And their descent is known by their mothers’ vulva.

Manliness

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “There is no valid religiosity without the virtue of manliness.”

Rabī‘at al-Raʿy said, “Manliness consists of six traits, three of which are practiced when one lives in a settled society, and three others when one is traveling. As for the latter, they are: offering food, having good manners, and showing pleasant companionship; as for the former, they are: reciting the Qurʾān, abiding in mosques, and being graced with sexual chastity.”

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, said, “Manliness is of two kinds: one visible and one invisible. Visible manliness consists in wealth and accoutrements; and invisible manliness consists in chastity.”

Muʿāwiya asked a delegation that came to see him, “What do you consider manliness to be?” They said, “Chastity and improvement of one’s livelihood.” He said, “Hear this, Yazīd.”

Abū Hurayra was asked, “What is manliness?” He said, “Fear of God and looking after one’s profession.”

Al-Aḥnaf was asked, “What is manliness?” He said, “Being chaste and practicing a trade.”

‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Umar, may God be pleased with both of them, said, “We, people of Quraysh, don’t consider forbearance and generosity as qualities of dominion, but we do consider chastity and good use of one’s wealth as qualities of manliness.”

Al-Aḥnaf said, “A liar has no manliness, a miser has no dominion, and an ill-mannered man has no godliness.”

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “Overlook the slips of those who practice manly deeds, for – by Him who has my soul in His hand – one of them may stumble even when his hand is in God’s.”

Al-‘Utbi said on the authority of his father, “Manliness is not complete unless a man has five traits: he should be knowledgeable, truthful, rational, eloquent, and able to dispense with other people.”

A poet said:

A man’s worth is what he makes of himself.
So, make yourself a man of good manners.

‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān was asked, “Was Muṣ‘ab ibn al-Zubayr in the habit of drinking wine?” He answered, “If Muṣ‘ab thought that water would vitiate his manliness, he would not drink it.”

It was said, “Whoever learns from the cock three things and from the crow three others will make his good manners and manliness perfect: from the cock, he should learn its generosity, its courage, and its jealousy; and from the crow, its early rise to seek sustenance, its great caution, and its concealment of sexual intercourse.”

Classes of men

Khālīd ibn Ṣafwān said, “People are of three classes: a class of scholars, a class of orators, and a class of litterateurs; and there is a group of brainless people among them who make prices rise, who cause markets to be sluggish, and who render waters turbid.”

Al-Ḥasan said, “Men are of three kinds: a man who is like food and is indispensable, a man who is like medication and is needed only from time to time, and a man who is like disease and is not needed at all.”

Muṭarrif ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Shikhhir said, “People are of three kinds: human beings, monkeys, and people who have been steeped in the water of people.”

Al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad said, “Men are of four kinds: a man who knows, and knows that he knows – this one is a scholar, so ask him questions; a man who knows, and does not know that he knows – this one is forgetful, so remind him; a man who does not know, and knows that he does not know – this one is

an ignorant man, so teach him; and a man who does not know, and does not know that he does not know – this one is a stupid man, so do not have anything to do with him.”

A poet said:

Is it not an affliction that you are ignorant,
And that you don't know that you don't know?
If you don't know and are not like one who knows,
How then will you know that you don't know?

Another poet said:

It is a real disease when you teach an ignorant man
And he ignorantly claims that he knows more than you.

‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, said, “People are of three kinds: religious scholars, learners seeking salvation, and uncivilized rabble who are favorably inclined to every wind.”

Wise men said, “Friends are of three kinds: a friend who loves you sincerely, gives to you generously, and exerts himself to help you; a friend with good intentions who limits himself to his good intention toward you but does not offer his generosity and help; and a friend who flatters you and is distracted from you by his own affairs, and showers down his lies and oaths upon you.”

Al-Shaʿbī said, “Commenting to his companions about a man passing by, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Masʿūd said, ‘This man does not know and does not know that he does not know, and he will not learn from one who knows.’”

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “Be either a scholar or a learner, but don't be one of a third status and consequently perish.”

The riffraff

Al-ghamghā [the riffraff] means *al-dabā*, which are the young of the locusts; and common people have been compared to them.

Common people were mentioned to ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās and he said, “Whenever they gather, they do harm; and whenever they are separated, they do good.” He was asked, “We know the harm of their coming together, but what is the good of their being separated?” He answered, “Then, the cupper will go to his shop, the smith to his bellows, and every craftsman to his craft.”

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, saw a group of people following a man who had been caught in a suspicious act. He commented, “May these faces be unwelcome, for they are only seen when there is evil.”

Ḥabīb ibn Aws al-Ṭāʿī said:

If you wish to have a fully bad opinion [of men],
Let it wander among these common people.

Diʿbil said:

How many people are or rather how few!
 God knows I am not saying something wrong.
 When I open my eyes to look, I look
 At many but I don't see anyone.

Unpleasant people

ʿĀ'isha, may God be pleased with her, said, "A Qur'anic verse was revealed about unpleasant people: '... and when you have finished eating, disperse and don't seek to engage in idle talk.'" [Q. 33:52]

Al-Shaʿbī said, "Whoever misses the dawn prayer, let him curse the unpleasant people."

Galen was asked, "Why is an unpleasant man heavier than a weighty burden?" He answered, "Because an unpleasant man is a burden on one's heart and not on one's limbs, whereas a weighty burden is borne by one's limbs with the help of one's heart."

Sahl ibn Hārūn said, "Whoever is burdensome to you by his presence and distresses you by his questions, turn a deaf ear to him and a blind eye."

When Abū Hurayra used to feel that a man was burdensome, he used to say, "God, forgive him and give us rest from him."

Al-Aʿmash used to say when an unpleasant man attended his gathering:

A dead elephant you carry is not heavier
 Than some of those attending our gathering.

Abū Ḥanifa said to al-Aʿmash upon visiting him when he was sick, "If I were not afraid of being burdensome to you, Abū Muḥammad, I would have visited you twice a day, by God." Al-Aʿmash retorted, "By God, my nephew, you are burdensome to me when you are in your own home; how much more you would be if you were to visit me twice a day!"

Mentioning an unpleasant person who used to sit with him, a man said, "By God, when he sits with me, I hate the side of my body next to which he sits."

A man engraved the following on his ring, "You are boring; get up and go." So when an unpleasant person sat with him, he would give him the ring and ask him, "Read what is engraved on this ring."

When Ḥammād ibn Salama used to see someone he considered unpleasant, he used to recite the Qur'anic verse, "Our Lord, remove the torment from us, we are believers." [Q. 44:12]

Bashshār al-ʿUqaylī said the following verses about an unpleasant man whose patronymic was Abū ʿImrān:

Many a companion in a gathering is burdensome
 Although he may be light in the scale of a balance.

When a burdensome person heavier than Mt. Thahlān
 Casts his shadow over a people's gathering, I say:
 "How will earth be unable to carry the Trust
 When it can carry Abū 'Imrān?"

Another poet said:

O you, you are burdensome,
 Burdensome, and burdensome.
 In looks, you are a human being
 But in the scales you are an elephant.

Al-Ḥasan ibn Hānī? said about a burdensome man:

A burdensome man looms to us from nearby.
 When it pleases him to spite me, he comes.
 As he appears, I say, "May he not appear.
 May no feet carry him to us."
 I can't discern your specter, not because of blindness;
 And I can't discern your voice, not because of deafness.

He also said about him:

I don't think camels can save me
 From you, man, nor can a ship.
 If I were to mount Burāq, I would be overtaken
 By your unpleasantness, despite your far home.
 Will you be satisfied with a gift from what I own
 That you will take all at once and depart?

He also said about him:

O you who are like a rip, to gathered companions:
 Your speech is like scratches in one's throat.
 Will you be satisfied to take from my wealth
 And from what my hands have, be it great or small?
 Take it from me, just so, as a ransom
 And go away to a distant and deep place.

He also said about him:

O you, mountain of loathing
 That has anchored and does not leave:
 You have occupied my thinking
 And I don't know what you are good for.
 You are not good to be lampooned,
 Nor are you good to be praised.

A burdensome man gave a camel as gift to a pleasant man then stayed at his home
 until he bored him, so the pleasant man said:

O boring man who has given a camel as a gift,
 Take two thousand camels and depart.
 He said, 'What will they be loaded with?'
 I said, "Raisins and honey."
 He said, "And who will lead them?"
 I said, "Two thousand men."
 He said, "And who will drive them?"
 I said, "Two thousand heroes."
 He said, "And what will they be wearing?"
 I said, "Jewelry and suits."
 He said, "And what will be their weapons?"
 I said, "Swords and spears."
 He said, "They will be my slaves, then?"
 I said, "Yes, and servants."
 He said, "Put this in writing therefore
 As a record for me against you."
 I said to him, "Two thousand records,
 And assure us that you will depart."
 He said, "Have I annoyed you?"
 I said, "Yes, indeed yes."
 He said, "Have I bored you?"
 I said, "To a great extent."
 He said, "Have I been a burden to you?"
 I said, "An overburden."
 He said, "I am then departing."
 I said, "Make haste, make haste."
 O star of ill-fortune who
 Exceeds Saturn's misfortune,
 O mountain of a mountain,
 O mountain on top of a mountain!

Al-Ḥamdūnī said the following about a hateful, loathed man:

O son of a hateful mother and a hateful father,
 Who cannot be surpassed in hatred.
 I beseech you by God to tell me the truth
 Although I know you are not truthful:
 Do you hate yourself because of your hatred?
 If not, you are then stupid!

He also said the following about him:

You are considered a woman of the people,
 If you are, at all, counted as one of the people.
 I was told that, when the Devil
 Sees you, he turns away from you.

Ḥabīb al-Ṭāḥī said the following about a similar man, that is, a detestable man:

O man about whose looks the world feels annoyed
 As eyelids are annoyed by ophthalmia:
 He walks arrogantly on the ground and, hating his face,
 I think he is walking on my heart.
 If the earth contained only part of his odiousness,
 Death would not approach it, out of pity for everyone.

Al-Ḥasan ibn Hānī² said the following about al-Faḍl al-Raqāshī:

I saw al-Raqāshī at a certain place,
 And I hated and detested him.
 He said, "Suggest some of what you desire."
 I said, "I suggest that you keep silent."

Al-Shaʿbī recited the following to me:

I have been afflicted with a group of men
 Who are stupid, the lightest of them being burdensome.
 They are dull and when I sit with them
 My mind rusts because of their nearness.
 They don't make me understand what they say,
 And what I say is too fine for their understanding.
 They feel they are many when I am with them,
 And I feel diminished when I am with them.

Al-ʿUtībī said, "Al-Kisāʾī wrote the following to al-Raqāshī:

You complained to us about your crazy men
 And I complain to you about our crazy men.
 You began by mentioning your filthy ones,
 How stinky and how filthy are the ones we have!
 If we did not have a sound state, we would be like them;
 And if they did not have an affliction, they would be like us."

Ḥabīb al-Ṭāʾī said:

There is a friend of mine whose company bores me,
 May God soon bereave me of him.
 I stole his knife and his dagger
 To cut off our relationship, but I failed.

Ḥabīb also said:

O you in whose face, when it looms, there is
 Hatred as abundant as the treasures of Qārūn:
 If anything ever escapes from its appearance,
 One part of you then will escape from another
 Because you are from the loins of our father [Adam]
 Who brought us all down to the earth.

Abū Ḥātim said, “Abū Zayd al-Anṣārī, the grammarian and author of anecdotes, recited the following to me:

Yaḥyā’s face invites one to spit on it,
Yet I spare my spittle from him.”

Abū Ḥātim said, “Al-ʿUtbī recited the following to me:

He has a face on which spitting is lawful
And which to greet is unlawful.”

He also said, “And he recited the following to me:

Abū Umayya’s shirt is what you know,
And dirtier than it is Abū Umayya’s skin.”

Names as omens

ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, asked a man, whom he wanted to employ, about his name and his father’s. The man said, “Zālim [oppressor], son of Surāqa [larceny].” ʿUmar said, “You oppress and your father robs!” And he did not employ him to do anything for him.

ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb asked a man who had approached him, “What is your name?” The man said, “Shihāb [flame], son of Ḥurqa [combustion].” ʿUmar asked, “From what parentage?” The man said, “From the folks of Ḥarrat al-Nār [lava field of fire].” “Where do you live?” ʿUmar asked. “In Dhāt Lazā [blazing locale],” the man replied. ʿUmar said, “Go. Your people have been burnt.” And what ʿUmar said, may God be pleased with him, had happened.

ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, met Masrūq ibn al-Ajdaʿ and asked him, “Who are you?” “Masrūq ibn al-Ajdaʿ,” the man replied. ʿUmar commented, “I heard God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, say, ‘An *ajdaʿ* [a mutilated man] is a devil.’”

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, on couriers

Sufyān related on the authority of Hishām al-Dastuwāʿī that Yaḥyā ibn Abi Kathīr said, “God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, wrote to his military commanders, ‘Don’t send a courier unless he has a handsome face and a beautiful name.’”

Al-Ḥajjāj and al-Muhallab’s messenger

After al-Muhallab ibn Abi Ṣufra had finished fighting the Azraqites, he sent a man named Mālik ibn Bashīr to inform al-Ḥajjāj of his victory. When the messenger entered the presence of al-Ḥajjāj, the latter asked him, “What is your name?” The messenger said, “Mālik [reigning] ibn Bashīr [glad tidings messenger].” Al-Ḥajjāj declared, “Reign and glad tidings!”

A poet said:

When there is a misfortune that I wish to avert,
I invoke alternately the names of Aslam and Rabāḥ

He means to seek a good omen by mentioning Aslam and Rabāḥ, names linguistically related to *salāma* [safety] and *ribḥ* [gain].

**The optimism of the Messenger, may God bless him
and grant him peace**

Al-Riyāshī said on the authority of al-Aṣmaʿī, “When God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, came to Medina, he stayed at the home of a man from the Anṣār, who called out to his two servants, ‘O Sālim [safe] and O Yasār [prosperity]!’ God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, ‘May this house be safe and enjoy prosperity.’”

**The Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace,
and Ḥazn ibn Abī Wahb**

Saʿīd ibn al-Musayyib ibn Ḥazn ibn Abī Wahb al-Makhzūmī said, “When my grandfather Ḥazn ibn Abī Wahb came to the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, the Prophet asked him, ‘What is your name?’ My grandfather said, ‘Ḥazn [rugged ground]!’ God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, ‘Rather Sahl [soft ground].’ My grandfather said, ‘I am not one to change the name that my mother gave me.’” Saʿīd said, “We still have that ruggedness in our natural dispositions to this day.”

The Arabs and the crow

The Arabs considered the crow a bad omen because its Arabic name *ghurāb* is linguistically derived from *ghurba* [separation from one’s homeland].

Abū al-Shīṣ said:

As night casts its darkness, are you pleased
By a crow lamenting on the branch of a willow [*bān*]?
A crow’s croaking signals separation from the homeland,
And the willow signals distance [*bayn*], far from closeness.

Another poet said the following about *safarjal* [quinces]:

He was given quinces as a gift, so he saw an evil omen
In that, and continued to be pensive and tearful,
Fearing separation because the first syllable of the word
Is *safar* [departure], and he is right to see an evil omen in it.

Another poet said the following about *samsan* [lilies of the valley]:

O you who have given us lilies of the valley as a gift,
 You have not been charitable to us by this present.
 The first syllable of their name is *saṃ*^ṇ [evil]: you've hurt me.
 I wish I had never seen lilies of the valley.

Another poet said the following about *utrujj* [citron]:

His beloved gave him a citron as a gift,
 So he wept and feared the bad omen of an augur.
 He was afraid of his beloved's change, for a citron
 Is of two colors: its inside is different from its outside.

Al-Ṭāʾi said the following about *ḥamām* [pigeons]:

They are pigeons, but if for purposes of drawing portents
 You change the vowel *a* into *i*, they are *ḥimām* [death].

Ashʿab used to frequent a singing slave-girl in Medina. When he wanted to go away, he asked her to give him a golden ring she wore so that he might remember her by it. She said to him, “It is of gold [*dhahab*] and I am afraid that you will go [*tadhhab*] and not return. But take this twig [*ʿūd*], and haply you will return [*taʿūd*].”

A section on foreboding

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “There are three things, from which hardly anyone is safe: foreboding, suspicion, and envy.” He was asked, “What then is the way out of them, O Messenger of God?” He said, “If you have a feeling which you believe is a foreboding, don’t change your mind; if you have a feeling of suspicion, don’t investigate; and if you have a feeling of envy, don’t act unjustly.”

Abū Ḥātim said, “[A bird used in foretelling the future according to the direction of its flight is called] *sāniḥ* [auspicious] when it turns its right side to you, *bāriḥ* [inauspicious] when it turns its left side to you, *jābiḥ* [confrontational] when it flies toward you, and *qaʿid* [crippled] when it comes to you from behind.”

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “There should be no fear of contagion and no belief in evil omens.”

He also said, “Whoever believes in evil omens is not one of us.”

And he said, “If one of you sees an omen [in a bird’s flight] and says, ‘O God, there is no bird but Your bird, no good but Your good, and no god other than You,’ the omen will not harm him.”

The Arabs used to believe in evil omens and this appeared in their poems. A poet said:

The birds did not tell you the truth when you met us,
And he who deluded you about us was not knowledgeable.

Ḥassān [ibn Thābit], may God Most High be pleased with him, said:

I wish I knew, and I wish the birds could tell me
What transpired between ‘Alī and Ibn ‘Affān.
You shall soon hear [a shout] in their region:
“God is great. Ah for the vengeance of ‘Uthmān.”

Al-Ḥasan ibn Hānī? said:

The prince performed God’s command among the people
And he assumed power at the time of the fruits’ ripening.
The birds tell us – and the birds are truthful—
That there will be good living and there will be long life.

Something about Qutayba’s foreboding

Al-Shaybānī said, “When Qutayba ibn Muslim came to Khurāsān as a governor, he stood up to give a speech. His cane slipped from his hand and the people of

Khurāsān saw an evil omen in that. He said, ‘O people, it is not what you have thought but rather as a poet said:

She threw away her cane and settled down, after far travels,
Like a wayfarer satisfied with homecoming.’”

Making friends and one’s duties to them

Al-Awzā‘ī related on the authority of Yaḥyā ibn Abī Kathīr that David said to his son Solomon, peace be upon both of them, “My son, don’t discount [even] one enemy or consider a thousand friends too numerous; and don’t exchange an old friend for a new one so long as he is faithful to you.”

A *ḥadīth* traceable to Prophet Muḥammad says, “A man becomes a multitude by having a friend.”

Shabīb ibn Shayba said, “Brethren of purity are better than the whole world’s profits: they are an ornament in prosperity, an aid in adversity, and a help against enemies.”

Ibn al-A‘rābī recited the following verses:

I swear by your life that a man’s wealth is no treasure,
It is rather the brethren of purity who are treasures.

Al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays said, “The best friend is one who, if you [act as though you] have no need for him, will not increase his affection for you, and who, if you are in need of him, will not withhold any of it from you; he is one who, if you are outnumbered, will support you, and who, if you seek his help, will help you.” And he recited the following verses:

Your friend is one who, if called in a calamity, will respond;
And, if you are in a fury to use the sword, is furious with you.

Another poet said:

Take care of your brother, for he who has no brother
Is like one going into a battle without a weapon.
And know that one’s cousin is one’s wings:
Can a falcon fly without wings?

One of the duties to one’s friend is giving him advice to the limit of one’s abilities, for it has been said, “A man’s friend is his mirror that shows him his own good and bad qualities.”

It was said, “A friend is a person who gives you sincere affection and offers you generous help.”

It was also said, “Best friends are those who turn toward you when Time turns away from you.”

A poet said:

The best friend to associate with when you are happy
 Is the one who comforted when you were sad.
 When noble people are in the lap of prosperity,
 They remember those who befriended them in adversity.

Another poet said:

Patience is a sign of one's noble nature, and
 Constant reminding of bestowed favors impairs them.
 Breaking a promise to a friend
 Is a cause of a rupture of relations.

Muḥammad ibn Yazīd al-Mubarrid recited the following verses to ‘Abd al-Ṣamad ibn al-Mu‘adhdhal about al-Ḥasan ibn Ibrāhīm:

O you whose soul I ransom by mine, and for whom
 I am a protection from what he and I fear:
 Tell your brother, even if he is very far,
 That I meet him although I don't meet with him,
 And that my eyes are constantly seeing him,
 Even if his abode is distant from mine.
 God knows that I don't remember him:
 How would one who has not forgotten him remember him?
 Think, is there any beautiful quality not possessed by Ḥasan?
 Is there a young man whose beneficence equals his?
 Time will come to an end, but his noble deeds will not;
 Rain drops can be counted, but his gifts cannot.

A governor's saying about friends

A governor was asked, "How many friends do you have?" "I don't know," he replied, "fortune smiles on me now and all people are my friends; but I will know my real friends when fortune frowns on me."

When the caliphate devolved on al-Manṣūr, a friend of his sent him a letter in which were the following verses:

We are your retinue who
 Endure what you endure.
 We are seen and known to have enmity
 And alienation to those with whom you are unfriendly.
 Out of concern for you, we spend the night
 As watchful vanguards – when the night is still.

When the verses reached Abū Ja‘far [al-Manṣūr], he wrote after each verse, "You spoke truly." He then called him and made him join the company of his friends.

Reproving a friend and retaining his affection

Wise men have said, "Among the things a person owes his friend is to overlook his lapses and disregard his misdeeds. If he corrects himself and satisfies you, [well and good;] otherwise, reprove him gently, for excessive reproof leads to alienation."

‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, said, "Don't break relations with your friend on the basis of suspicion, and don't abandon him without seeking an opportunity for reproof."

Abū al-Dardā' said, "How can you ever have your friend all to yourself with undivided attention?"

And it was said, "What man is perfectly well-mannered?"

Bashshār al-ʿUqaylī said:

If you do not often drink, despite a mote in your drink,
You will be thirsty. What man imbibes only pure drink?

It was said, "Reproving a friend is better than losing him."

A poet said:

If reproof is not practiced, no affection will endure
Affection abides as long as reproof remains.

Muḥammad ibn Abān said:

If I do not patiently bear a friend's offense
But punish him, what is the value of disparity in virtues?
If a joint of mine hurts and I cut it off,
I will end up having no joints to hold me up.
I should rather treat my joint: if it heals, I will be happy;
But if it does not, I will have to tolerate it.

Al-Aḥnaf said, "A friend has an obligation to bear three things: an injustice based on anger, an injustice based on favor, and an injustice based on error."

‘Abd Allāh ibn Mu‘āwiya said:

I will not break relations with my friend
And will not divulge his secret when he is angry.
Take care of trustworthy friends, for they are few,
And keep in touch with them rather than other friends.
A friend is none other than one whose affection for you is pure
And who gives you advice when you are careless.

The merit of friendship over kinship

Buzurjimihr was asked, "Whom do you love more: your brother or your friend?"
He replied, "I don't love my brother unless he is a friend of mine."

Aktham ibn Ṣayfī said, “Kinship is in need of affection, but affection is not in need of kinship.”

‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās said, “Kinship can be cut off and beneficence can be met with ungratefulness. But I have not seen [any relationship as durable] as the mutual closeness of hearts.”

It was said, “Beware of those whom your hearts hate, for hearts punish other hearts.”

‘Abd Allāh al-Khurāsānī said:

I take sides with my companions against my brother
And support my friend against my sibling.
If you find me to be an obeyed king,
You will also find me to be the slave of my friend.
I keep my beneficence and my favors separate,
But I combine my wealth and [my friends’] rights.

Ḥabīb al-Ṭā’ī said:

I have fathomed people and experienced them,
And I have tested the reasons they advance.
I found kinship doesn’t bring close one who severs its bonds,
And I discovered that affection is the closest lineage.

Al-Mubarrid said:

Kinship belongs only to the one whose love for you is true and
Who does not betray you; and it does not depend on descent.
How many relatives there are whose hearts harbor rancor,
And how many unrelated strangers whose hearts are sincere!

Wise men said, “Many a brother of yours has not been born from your mother.”

They also said, “Near of kin is he who is near to help.”

And they said, “A stranger is often closer than a relative.”

A poet said:

Many a stranger is often a bosom adviser,
And many a brother is often a backbiter.

And another said:

[A stranger] may be trustworthy and pleased for my good,
Even if there is no kinship between us to make us close.
He is more lovable to me than two thousand relatives
Whose hearts make me suspicious.

Another poet said:

Remain in touch with a stranger who keeps in touch with you,
And break relations with a relative who breaks them.

Wealth may be amassed by one who does not use it,
 And it may be used by one who has not amassed it.
 Be then satisfied with what Time has allotted to you;
 Whoever is happy with his living will be rewarded by Time.

And he said:

Every stressful worry will be relieved,
 It will not tarry with every night and morning.
 Don't ever scorn a poor man; for you may
 One day kneel down, and Time will raise him up.

Ibn Harma said:

What an excellent young man you were who
 Were tragically stricken at the Battle of al-Baqīʿ!
 When guests came to his home, he cheered up;
 He easily opened up and his servants were polite.
 Whenever one saw his friend and his brother,
 One did not know which of them was his near of kin.

Being friendly to people

A *ḥadīth* traceable to Prophet Muḥammad says, "The dearest of people to God are those who are most friendly to others."

Another such *ḥadīth* says, "When God loves one of His servants, He makes him lovable to others."

On this theme, we said:

[He has] a face whose shyness is enveloped by tranquility,
 And by love that runs with every breath.
 When God ever loves one of His servants,
 He sheds on him love for others.

ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, wrote to Saʿd ibn Abi Waqqāṣ, "When God loves one of His servants, He makes His other creatures love him. So consider your standing in relation to God as your standing in relation to other people, and know that the store [of good deeds] you have with God is like the store other people have from you."

Saʿid ibn Muslim stood at the gate of Abū Duhmān, being prevented from entering for a while. When he was permitted to enter, he stood in front of Abū Duhman and said, "This power that has devolved on you and is now in your hands was in the hands of another, and it has indeed become the talk of everyone: if you are good, then it will be good talk; and if bad, then it will be bad talk. Therefore, endear yourself to God's servants by your good cheer, by facilitating their ability to come and see you, and by being gentle and tractable to them. The love of God's servants for you is related to God's love for you, and

their hatred is related to His; for they are God's witnesses to His creatures' deeds, and they are His observers of those who go off His path."

Al-Jārūd said, "Being bad-tempered spoils one's [good] deed, just as vinegar spoils the honey."

Mu'āwiya was asked, "Who is the dearest person to you?" He replied, "Whoever has done me a good deed." He was asked, "Who is next?" He replied, "The person to whom I have done a good deed."

Muḥammad ibn Yazīd, the grammarian, said, "I came to see al-Khalil [ibn Aḥmad] and found him sitting on a little cushion. He made place for me to sit on it, but I did not like to inconvenience him, so I was distressed. He took hold of my forearm and brought me closer to him, saying, "The eye of a needle is not too small for two lovers, and the whole world is not large enough to contain two persons hating each other."

On this theme, we said:

Be united with someone you love, even if he reproves you,
For the best life is when there is union between two lovers.
And break relations with a friend you have no harmony with,
For the whole world is perhaps too small for two persons.

Describing love

Ibn Ṭāhir describing love

Abū Bakr al-Warrāq said, "Al-Ma'mūn asked 'Abd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir, the Man of Two Leaderships, about love and what it was. He said, 'Commander of the Faithful, when the essences of two intertwining souls strike a spark in a union of affinity, a glow of light is emitted by which the inner bodily organs are illuminated; as a result, the natural dispositions of life are moved by the radiance and a new present is created for each soul, connected with its feelings; and this is called love.'"

Ḥammād al-Rāwīya was asked about love and what it was. He said, "Love is a tree whose root is thought, whose twigs are remembrance, whose branches are sleeplessness, whose leaves are lovesickness, and whose fruit is death."

Mu'ādh ibn Sahl said, "Love is the most difficult mount, the most intoxicating drink, the most horrid happening, the sweetest thing desired, the most painful inner feeling, and the most delightful outward condition."

And it is as a poet said:

Love has evils which, when they are clear,
Appear as signs with yellow brightness.
Its inner essence is sickness and its exterior, ardor.
Its beginning is remembrance and its end, thought.

It was said, “Don’t let your love be an infatuation and your hatred an exaggeration.”

Bashshār al-ʿUqaylī said:

Do you know a status other than love that
Can bring one closer to you? Love has driven me far from you.

Another poet said:

I love you with such love that, if you love back with it equally,
You will be afflicted with madness, out of passion for me.
It is gentle inside me, but its day is full of
Tears and its night is constant moaning.

Relationship with someone who had a relationship with your father

A *ḥadīth* related by Ibn Abī Shayba from the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, says, “Don’t break up relations with someone who had a relationship with your father, for by that you would extinguish his light, your love being your father’s love.”

ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd said, “One of the devout acts of a living person toward a dead one is to preserve relations with someone who had a relationship with his father.”

Abū Bakr said, “Love and hate are inherited.”

A proverb on this theme says, “Don’t own a puppy of an evil dog.”

A poet said:

You hope [for action] from the son, his father having wearied you.
Your hope from the son after his father is in vain!

Tamīm ibn Murr and Bakr ibn Wāʿil met at an Arab king’s gathering, and a disagreement and a boasting match occurred between them. They said, “O king, give us two swords to fight with in front of you so that you may know who is the better fighter.” So the king ordered that two swords of wood be given to them, and they fought for a long part of the day.

Bakr ibn Wāʿil said:

If our two swords were of steel, they would have cut.

Tamīm ibn Murr said:

Or if they were hewn from rock, they would have been cleft.

The king intervened and stopped them.

Tamīm ibn Murr said to Bakr ibn Wāʿil:

I will maintain my enmity to you as long as we live.

And Bakr replied:

And when we die, we will bequeath it to our sons.

It is said that the enmity between the tribes of Bakr and Tamīm has continued because of that until this day.

The enmity of Bakr and Tamīm and the poetry of Ibn Ḥilliza

Abū Zayd said, “Abū ‘Ubayda said, ‘[Members of the tribe of] Bakr ibn Wā’il built a shop in Sijistān and [members of the tribe of] Tamīm destroyed it. Then Tamīm built a shop and Bakr destroyed it. So they fought twenty-four battles about that, and Ibn Ḥilliza al-Yashkurī said the following verses about that:

O carefree woman, woe unto you. Bring me my shield,
Our war with Tamīm is blazing.
They are brethren who have attributed offenses to us
Collected in recent and in ancient times.
They have sought to make peace with us, but in vain.
What they seek is beyond the stars.’”

Envy

‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, said, “An envious person can have no rest, a bored person can have no friendship, and an ill-mannered person can have no lover.”

Al-Ḥasan said, “I have never seen an oppressor who is more like an oppressed than an envious person: he always has labored breathing, constant sorrow, and endless grief.”

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “Envy almost defeats fate.”

Mu‘āwiya said, “I can satisfy all the people but not a person who envies another’s blessing, for nothing satisfies him but its cessation.”

A poet said:

All kinds of enmity may be hoped to perish
Except the enmity of one who is your enemy out of envy.

‘Abd Allāh ibn Mas‘ūd said, “Don’t be enemies to God’s blessings.” He was asked, “And who is an enemy to God’s blessings?” He said, “Those who envy other people for what God has given them of His bounty. God says in one of the scriptures, ‘An envious person is an enemy to My blessing, he is angry at My judgment and unsatisfied with My decreed lot.’”

It is said, “Envy is the first offense by which God was disobeyed in heaven and the first offense by which He was disobeyed on earth. In heaven, it was Satan’s envy of Adam; and on earth, it was Cain’s envy of Abel.”

Interpreting God Most High’s verse, “Our Lord, show us those who led us astray, both among jinn and mankind, so that we may put them under our feet and they may both be among the lowest” [Q. 41:29], one of the Qur’ān’s exegetes said, “By ‘among jinn,’ He meant Satan; and by ‘among mankind,’ He meant Cain. That is because Satan was the first to be ungrateful, and Cain was the first to kill. The motivation of all this was envy.”

Abū al-‘Atāhiya said:

My Lord, people are not fair to me. And how can they be
 If, when I am fair to them, they treat me unjustly?
 If I am in possession of anything, they rise to take it from me;
 And if I come to seek their giving, they prevent me.
 If they receive my generous gifts, they don’t thank me;
 And if I don’t give to them generously, they revile me.
 If an affliction befalls me, they rejoice over it;
 And if a blessing is bestowed upon me, they envy me.
 I will prevent my heart from yearning for them
 And I will veil my eyes and eyelids from them.

Qays ibn Zuhayr and Ghaṭafān

Abū ‘Ubayda Ma‘mar ibn al-Muthannā said, “Qays ibn Zuhayr was traveling through the tribe lands of Ghaṭafān and noticed their wealth and numbers, so he did not like that. He was asked, ‘Are you displeased by what makes other people happy?’ He replied, ‘You don’t know that with fortune and wealth, there is mutual envy and disunion; and that with privation there is mutual help and support.’”

And it used to be said, “No people ever became wealthy but envied each other and argued with each other.”

A wise man said, “The most melancholy of men are four: a sharp man, an envious man, a man mingling with litterateurs who is not a litterateur, and a wise man who is scorned by the people.”

‘Alī ibn Bishr al-Marwazī said, “Ibn al-Mubārak wrote the following verses to me:

You may hope for all kinds of enmity to end
 Except that of one who is your enemy from envy
 In his heart, it remains like a tied knot
 And no magician will ever be able to untie it
 Except God – if He has mercy, it will be untied by Him;
 But if He refuses, then hope for it from no one.”

A wise man was asked, "Which one of your enemies would you like not to come back to you as a friend?" He replied, "The envious one, for nothing will bring him back to like me but the cessation of my good fortune."

Sulaymān al-Taymī said, "Envy weakens one's certainty, keeps one awake, and increases one's anxiety."

Al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays prayed for Ḥāritha ibn Qudāma al-Sa'di, saying, "May God have mercy on you. You did not envy a rich man, nor did you scorn a poor man."

It used to be said, "There is no free man who is miserly and no generous man who is envious."

A wise man said, "The most painful misfortune is when your want is clear and time stretches out and you are unable to do anything. You will then lack no friend who turns his back on you, no cousin who gloats, no neighbor who is envious, no companion who has become an enemy, no wife who seeks divorce, no slave-girl who asks to be sold, no male slave who scorns you, and no son who scolds you. Look around, then, and do your best to escape."

A man from Quraysh said:

They envied the blessing when it came,
And they cast aspersions on it.
Yet, when God bestows a blessing,
No words of the enemies of blessings will harm it.

It was said, "If you like to be safe from an envious man, keep him in the dark regarding your affairs."

ʿĀ'isha, may God be pleased with her, used to quote the following verses as aphorisms:

If Time afflicts some people with its events,
It also burdens others with great distress.
Tell those who gloat over our misfortune, "Wake up!
Those who gloat will meet with what we have met."

A poet said:

Beware of envy, for it is an evil. Be wary of it and
Guard yourself against inadvertency when envied.
If an envious person exhibits affection toward you
In words, he is still a diligent enemy to you.

Satan and Noah

Al-Layth ibn Sa'd said, "I was informed that Satan met Noah, may God bless him and grant him peace, and Satan said to him, 'Beware of envy and greed, for I envied Adam and so I left Paradise; and Adam was greedy over one tree from which he was prohibited [to eat] and so he left Paradise.'"

Al-Ḥasan said, “The roots of evil are three and its branches are six: the three roots are envy, avarice, and love of this world; and the six branches are love of sleep, love of eating, love of rest, love of leadership, love of praise, and love of boasting.”

Al-Ḥasan also said, “A person may envy his friend to the point where he defames his very secret thoughts and feelings when he does not know his public ones, he blames him for things he does not know about him, and he learns from him during their friendship what he reproaches him for during their enmity. By God, I don’t think this man is a real Muslim.”

Ibn Abī al-Dunyā said, “I was told about ‘Umar ibn Dharr that he had said, ‘O God, save us from anyone who wants to harm us, by either of Your decisions You wish: forgiveness [by us] or respite [from him].’”

Ibn ‘Abbās said, “I have never envied any person for these two words.”

Ibn ‘Abbās also said, “Don’t disdain a word of wisdom you hear from a sinful man, for his example is one of which someone of old said, ‘Many a shot is without a marksman.’”

A wise man said, “There is nothing more destructive of faith and more disclosing of private hidden matters than envy. That is because an envious person opposes God’s judgment, is unjust to His servants, and impertinent to his Lord. He considers God’s blessings as grudges, His abundant gifts as jealousies, and the fairness of His fate as injustice. [For him, all] people have one condition but he has a [different] condition. At night, he is not calm. His greed does not subside and his life does not benefit him. He disdains God’s blessings bestowed upon him and is angry with what His fate has given him. His thirst for more can never be appeased and his disastrous plots can never be considered benign. If you make peace with him, he will harm you. If you establish relations with him, he will cut you off. If you break up with him, he will anticipate you [in this].”

An envious person was mentioned to a wise man, and the latter said, “How strange is a man whom Satan has placed in the abyss of error and thrust in the hazards of perdition! He lies in wait for God Most High’s blessings so that if He bestows them upon those He loves of His servants, his heart is made to feel chagrin for what has not been destined for him and jealousy about what he has not been meant to receive.”

A young man at Ramla [that is, Cordova] recited the following verses to me:

Be patient with the envy of an envious man,
For your patience will kill him.
He is like fire, which consumes itself
When it finds nothing else to consume.

‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān said to al-Ḥajjāj, “There is nobody but knows his own faults. So, describe your faults to me.” Al-Ḥajjāj said, “Spare me, O Commander of the Faithful.” “I will not,” the caliph insisted. Al-Ḥajjāj said, “I

am persistent, fiercely hostile, spiteful, and envious.” The caliph commented, “Satan has no worse qualities than these.”

Al-Manşūr said to Sulaymān ibn Mu‘āwiya al-Muhallabī, “How quickly people envy your folks!” He said:

You will find that honorable chiefs are always envied,
But you will never see that ignoble people are envied.

Abū Mūsā recited the following verses to Naṣr ibn Sayyār:

I grew up knowing that my enviers are numerous.
O God, to Whom angels ascend, don’t decrease their number.
If they envy me for my good performance against them,
It is my good performance that attracts envy to me.

Another poet said:

If they envy me, I will not blame them;
Virtuous people before me have been envied.
May my condition last, and so may theirs,
And may those of us more enraged die because of what they feel.

Another said:

The crow, which used to walk its walk
In the days that passed in bygone ages,
Envied the sand grouse and wanted to walk its walk
But, instead, it was beset by a kind of hobble.
It lost its own walk, and it mistook the sand grouse’s.
That is why it came to be called “swift-running she-camel”.

Ḥabīb al-Ṭā’ī said:

If God wants to publicize a person’s virtue
That has been unrecognized, He affords it an envier’s tongue.
If fire did not burn the things around it,
The sweet fragrance of aloes would not have been known.

Muḥammad ibn Munādhīr said:

O you who find fault with me, although I have
None, would you not desist and upbraid yourself?
Do you have a bone to pick with me and are seeking it,
Or are you going to apologize for what you have done?
If God has favored me with His fate,
When you are hard and dry, and have no juice in you,
Then may praise, thanks, and laudation be to Him,
And may soil and stone be to the envier.
What does any companion sitting with you benefit,

What does he see in you when he experiences you?
 Recite to us a sura that will remind us [of God].
 The best sermons are indeed the suras [of the Qurʾān].
 Or tell us the prescriptions of our laws of inheritance shares,
 How much is a female entitled to, and how much is a male.
 Or inform us of Islamic jurisprudence, by which our hearts live,
 And which tradition has brought us from our Prophet.
 Or narrate to us stories from our pre-Islamic period,
 For there is wisdom in them as well as practical experience.
 Or relate parables to us from the Persians,
 For their parables are moral lessons for us.
 If you are ignorant of all this and that,
 Then you yourself are an admonition to all who see you.
 Therefore, sing a song which will make the hearts tender,
 And part of what you have done will be forgiven.

A man from Basra envied by his people

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, “A man from Basra was a facetious and evil person, who harmed his neighbors and reviled their honor. A man came to admonish him and asked, ‘Why do your neighbors complain about you?’ He replied, ‘They envy me!’ The man asked him, ‘What do they envy you for?’ He said, ‘For crucifixion.’ ‘How is that?’ the man asked. ‘Come with me,’ he answered. Then they both went to his neighbors, and the man sat down, pretending to be sad. ‘What is the matter with you?’ the neighbors asked. He said, ‘Muʿāwiya’s letter arrived last night that I should be crucified along with Mālik ibn al-Mundhir, So-and-So, and So-and-So.’ And he mentioned a number of the noble people of Basra. The neighbors jumped on him and said, ‘Enemy of God! Will you be crucified with these men when you have no nobility [like theirs]?’ He turned to the man and said, ‘Don’t you see that they envy me for crucifixion? How much more would their envy be, if it were for something good?’”

Abū ʿĀṣim al-Nabīl was told, “Yaḥyā ibn Saʿīd envies you and probably disparages you.” So he recited:

You are neither alive nor dead
 If you have no enemies and you are not envied.

Mutual envy among relatives

ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, wrote to Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī, “Command that people who are relatives visit one another but not live as neighbors to one another.”

Aktham ibn Ṣayfī said, “Be far from one another in abodes, and you will be near one another in affection.”

And it was said, “The people who renounce a world most are those who live in it.”

Faraj ibn Sallām said, “Umayya ibn Abī al-Askar stood before a cousin of his and said:

I adjure you by the [Holy] House, which men from the tribe of
Luṭayy ibn Ghālib built and which they circumambulated.
You have tried me and have found that
I help you in grave matters and spare you my trouble,
And that, if the scorpions of a group’s enmity crawl
To you, my scorpions will crawl to them.

“His cousin said, ‘Yes, that is what you are like.’ Umayya asked, ‘Why then does your slander about me continue to circulate surreptitiously?’ His cousin said, ‘I will not do that again.’ Umayya said, ‘I am satisfied, may God forgive what happened in the past.’”

Yaḥyā ibn Saʿīd said, “Whosoever wants his action to be shown and his learning to be known, let him sit in gatherings other than those of his own people.”

It was said, “Relatives are scorpions.”

ʿAṭāʾ ibn Muṣʿab was asked, “How did your position with the Barmakids come to be so influential when they had those who were better litterateurs than you?” He answered, “I lived far from them, I had a strange name, I was of imposing grandeur, I had a small body, and I was of constant meandering. Keeping my distance from them made them draw me closer to them, and their desire to have me increased because of my reluctance to be with them. Those who are usually close don’t have the novelty of strangers.”

A man said to Khālīd ibn Ṣafwān, “I like you.” Khālīd said, “And what prevents you from that when you are neither a neighbor, nor a brother, nor a cousin?” He meant that envy was associated with those who were close, and increased as they became closer.

Al-Shaybānī said, “Abū al-ʿAbbās, the Commander of the Faithful, went out for a walk in al-Anbār. Far into his walk, he became distant from his companions and arrived at a bedouin’s tent. The bedouin asked him, ‘From what clan are you?’ The caliph said, ‘From Kināna.’ ‘From what tribe of Kināna?’ the bedouin asked. ‘From the Kināna tribe most hateful to Kināna,’ the caliph answered. The bedouin concluded, ‘Then you are from Quraysh.’ The caliph said, ‘Yes.’ ‘From which branch of Quraysh?’ the bedouin asked. The caliph said, ‘From the Quraysh branch most hateful to Quraysh.’ The bedouin said, ‘You are therefore [a descendant] of the sons of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib.’ ‘Yes,’ the caliph said. The bedouin asked, ‘And of which of the sons of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib are you [a descendant]?’ The caliph said, ‘Of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib’s sons most hateful to ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib’s other sons.’ The bedouin said, ‘You are therefore the Commander of the Faithful. Peace be to you, O Commander of the Faithful, and God’s mercy, and His blessings.’ The caliph appreciated the bedouin’s [intelligence] that he had observed and ordered that he be given a present.”

Dhū al-Iṣba‘ al-‘Adwānī said:

I have a cousin who, despite his good manners,
Is envious of me and so, I hate him and he hates me.
What mars our relations is that we are by far dissimilar,
So he thinks I am beneath him [in rank] and I think he is beneath me.
O ‘Amr, if you don’t leave off reviling me and detracting of my honor,
I will hit you until [you die and] your soul will cry for revenge.
Even if you are my relative, why should I care that
I don’t love you, when you don’t love me?
I don’t ask other people what their consciences bear—
What I bear for them in my conscience is sufficient for me.

Another poet said:

Take it easy, our cousins; take it easy, our friends.
Don’t dig up what has been buried of our past discord.
Don’t expect us to honor you when you humiliate us,
And to refrain from harming you when you harm us.
God knows that we don’t love you,
And we don’t blame you if you don’t love us.

Another poet said:

I fathomed people and experienced them,
And I described the bonds they described.
I found that kinship does not make closer a violator of consanguinity
And that affectionate friendship is the closest bond.

Similarity and one’s knowledge of one’s friend

It was said, “The closest kinship [between individuals] is similarity.” It was also said, “Your friend is a person who is analogous to you.”

Ḥabīb said:

I said, “He’s my brother.” They asked, “A blood brother?”
I said to them, “Those who are similar are relatives.”

He also said:

Someone with affection for me and someone with kinship are of equal status.
My siblings and my friends are on a par with one another.
They are a group whose manners are well-nigh my own.
Even if they are dispersed in the earth, they will remain my neighbors.

He also said:

Although we may have different parentage, we are united
By one culture that we have substituted for our father.

If we differ, our intimate connection has sweet water
That has come down from the same clouds.

Another poet said:

Souls are indeed like recruited soldiers
Who move about by our Lord's permission.
Those among them who know one another achieve harmony,
And those who are ignorant of one another have discord.

God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, "Souls are recruited soldiers who sniff one another out of affection as horses do; those of them who come to know one another achieve harmony among themselves, and those of them who remain ignorant of one another have discord."

He also said, may God bless him and grant him peace, "A friend is a patch in one's robe; so every one should consider with what he will patch his own robe."

He also said, may blessing and peace be upon him, "Judge people by their friends."

A poet said:

Form an opinion about a land by considering similar ones,
And form an opinion about a friend by considering his [friends].

It was said, "Every friend tends toward a similar friend."

A poet said:

A friend tends toward other friends as
Birds of the sky flock closely to their kinds.

Imru' al-Qays said:

O neighborly lady, we are both strangers here;
And every stranger is kin to another stranger.

Another poet said:

When you abide among a group, befriend their best;
And don't befriend the worst of them and become like him.
Don't ask about a person but rather ask about his associate;
For everyone emulates his own associate.

Another said:

Befriend people of virtue and religiosity,
For a person is linked to his associate.

Solomon, peace be on him, and the story of the eagle and the palace

Speaking about Solomon, Ayyūb said, "Abān ibn ʿIsā related to us on the authority of his father who had heard this from Ibn al-Qāsim and he said, 'While

Solomon, son of David, peace be upon both of them, was carried by the wind, he passed by an eagle perched on a palace. He asked the eagle, "How long have you been perching here?" The eagle replied, "Seven hundred years." Solomon asked, "And who built this palace?" The eagle replied, "I don't know. This is how I found it." Solomon looked around and saw writing engraved on it with the following verses:

We left the villages of Iṣṭakhr and went
 To the palace, where we had a midday nap.
 Whoever asks about the palace, we have found it already built.
 Don't befriend an evil man,
 Take care of yourself and beware of him.
 Many an ignorant man ruined
 A wise man who had befriended him.
 A man is judged by another man
 With whom he keeps company.
 Among human beings, there are human beings
 Who are judging standards and are similar.
 One can dispense with seeing with one's own eyes
 When one can hear what the mouths say.'"

Slander and iniquity

God, may His name be magnified, said, "O men, your iniquity is only against yourselves." [Q. 10:23]

He also said, may He be exalted, "[... and whosoever chastises as he was chastised] then is oppressed, God will surely help him." [Q. 22:60]

A poet said:

There can be no precedence to anyone through iniquity,
 For iniquity has a disastrous demise.

Al-ʿAttābī said:

You oppressed and so you died only by being killed.
 In this manner, iniquity fells every oppressor.

Al-Ma'mūn advising one of his sons

Al-Ma'mūn said one day to one of his sons, "Beware of listening to the speech of slanderers; for if a man slanders another, his esteem with me falls down so low that he can never retrieve it."

He also wrote over his signature on a slanderer's note, "We shall see whether you spoke truly or have been a liar."

He also wrote over his signature on a note of a man who had slandered one of his governors, "We have heard what God Almighty has said in His Book, so go away – may God have mercy on you."

Whenever slanderers were mentioned in his presence, he used to say, "What do you expect of a group of people whom God curses [even] when they tell the truth!"

A man slandered another to Bilāl ibn Abī Burda, and the latter said to him, "Go away, so that I may investigate what you have reported." He then found out that the man was a bastard and he said, "I am Abū 'Amr. I have never lied and have never been [successfully] lied to."

My father related to me on the authority of my grandfather that God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, "A slanderer is a bastard."

'Abd al-Malik and a man who backbit another to him

A man asked for privacy with 'Abd al-Malik, so the latter said to his companions, "If you please, go out." When the man was about to speak, 'Abd al-Malik said to him, "Beware of praising me, for I know myself better than you do; or of telling me a lie, for a liar can have no [acceptable] opinion; or of slandering someone to me. If you wish, I will dismiss you." The man said, "Dismiss me."

A man entered the presence of al-Walīd ibn 'Abd al-Malik while the latter was the governor of Damascus having been appointed by his own father. The man said, "I have a piece of advice for the prince." Al-Walīd said, "If it is for us, say it; if it is for another, we have no need of it." The man said, "A neighbor of mine committed an act of disobedience and fled from his mission." Al-Walīd said, "You are informing me that you are a bad neighbor. If you wish, we will send someone with you [to investigate]. If you are truthful, we will relieve you; and if you are a liar, we will punish you; but if you now wish, we will leave you alone." The man said, "Leave me alone."

From the history of the Persians

In the history books of the Persians, we read that a man slandered another man to Alexander, and the latter asked him, "Would you like the man's slander against you to be accepted as you wish your slander against him to be accepted?" The man said, "No." Alexander said, "Avoid then evil, and evil will avoid you."

A poet said:

If a slanderer ever treats your friend unjustly,
Don't abandon him to the slanderer's words.

The One-of-the-Two-Leaderships said, "Accepting slander is worse than slander itself, for slander is only an indication of something but accepting it is an authorization [to the slanderer]; and one who indicates something is not like one who accepts it and authorizes it."

Slanderers were mentioned in the presence of al-Ma'mūn and he said, "If their only fault is that when they are most truthful, they remain most hateful in the sight of God Most High, this will be sufficient for them."

Muṣʿab ibn al-Zubayr reproved al-Aḥnaf for something [he had done], and the latter denied it. Muṣʿab said, “A reliable authority informed me.” Al-Aḥnaf said, “An authority does not act as an informer.”

God has considered those who listen to [lies] partners with those who tell them, for He said, “They are habitual listeners to falsehood, constant eaters of things forbidden.” [Q. 5:42]

It was said, “Of evil, it suffices you to merely listen to it.”

A poet said:

By your life, a prince is not vilified by his enemy,
But rather he is vilified by a slandering informer.

Another said:

Don't ever accept slander which you are told,
And take your guard against him who informs you of it.
For he who has slanderously informed you
Will weave similar slander against you.
Don't remove a thorn in someone else's foot
And put it in yours, sparing the foot of him who planted it.

Diʿbil said:

Slanders have cut off the relationship between us
When we were in greater need of having it continue.
They saw a weak spot in us and gathered to seize on it,
Not restrained by reason or by embarrassment.
They were people in whose absence I had felt secure
But they have turned into what we now dislike and have gone too far.

Backbiting

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “If you speak of a man [only] with respect to the qualities he has, you will have backbitten him; and if you speak of him with respect to the qualities he does not have, you will have accused him of falsehoods.”

When Muḥammad ibn Sīrīn passed by a group of people, one of them stood up and said, “Abū Bakr, we have backbitten you, so give us your permission for having done so.” He said, “I will not make permissible what God has forbidden you to do. But whatever [else] I can do, you can do [too].”

As Raqaba ibn Maṣqala was sitting with his companions, they said something about a man. Shortly afterwards, that man appeared. One of the companions asked Raqaba, “Shall I tell him what we have said about him so that it will not be considered backbiting?” Raqaba replied, “Tell him, so that it may be considered slander.”

A man backbit another to Qutayba ibn Muslim, so Qutayba said to him, "Stop, man. By God, you are speaking ill of someone whose name was on the tongues of noble people."

Muḥammad ibn Muslim al-Ṭāʿifī said, "A man came to Ibn Sirīn and said to him, 'I was told you have backbitten me.' Ibn Sirīn replied, 'I am more dignified than that.'"

A man said to Bakr ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿIṣma, "I was told you have maligned me." Bakr said, "You would then be dearer to me than I am to myself."

A man maligned Ṭalḥa and al-Zubayr to Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, and the latter said, "Be silent! He who incites us against them has not reached our level of religion."

A man found fault with another in the presence of one of the nobles, so the latter said to him, "From your constant mentioning of other people's faults, I have concluded that you have many faults yourself; for the person who seeks [to mention] other people's faults seeks this inasmuch as he himself has them. Have you not heard the poet who said:

Don't reveal the shortcomings that people hide
For God will rip apart the veil of your own shortcomings.
Rather mention their merits, when they are mentioned;
And don't find fault with anyone by seeing in him your own fault."

Another poet said:

Don't forbid a behavior, and then commit the same;
It is a great shame on you if you do.
Begin with yourself: restrain yourself from error,
And if you do, you are a wise man.

Muḥammad ibn al-Sammāk said, "Avoid saying something about your friend for two reasons: one is that you may find fault with him regarding a quality that is in you; and the other is that if God has spared you from what He has afflicted him with, your thanks to God for this sparing will be a reproach of your friend for his affliction."

A wise man was told, "So-and-So [constantly] finds fault with you!" He replied, "Only one who weighs a coin clips it."

Buzurjimihr was asked, "Do you know anyone who is faultless?" He replied, "One who is faultless does not die."

ʿAmr ibn ʿUbayd was told, "Ayyūb al-Sikhtiyānī maligned you so much that we took pity on you." He said, "It is he you should take pity on."

Ibn ʿAbbās said, "Mention about your friend in his absence what you would like him to mention about you, and don't speak of things about him that you would like him not to speak about you."

The Prophet, God bless him and grant him peace, and Ibn al-Ḥaḍramī

Al-ʿAlāʾ ibn al-Ḥaḍramī came to see the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, and asked him, “Do you know any poetry?” The Prophet said, “Yes.” Al-Ḥaḍramī said, “Recite some to me.” So the Prophet recited:

Be friendly to spiteful people in a bid for closeness,
You will win them over – for a sandal can be patched.
If they increase their hatred, forgive out of good will;
And if they speak ill of you in your absence, don’t ask.
What would hurt you would be to hear it
And what they said behind your back was not said.

The Prophet added, “Indeed, there is wisdom in some poetry.”

Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said, “[Talking] about three persons is not considered backbiting: a sinner who openly declares his sin, a ruler who is unjust, and a heretic who will not abandon his heresy.”

Al-Kisāʾī wrote to al-Raqashī:

You have abandoned the mosque,
And abandoning it raises suspicions.
You do not perform supererogatory prayers,
Nor do you perform prescribed ones.
Your news reaches us
[As though] raised on flags.
If you increase your absence,
We’ll increase our backbiting.

Coaxing evil-doers

The Prophet, blessing and peace be upon him, said, “The worst people are those whom others are wary of, because of their evil.”

He also said, blessing and peace be upon him, “If you meet a mean person, don’t harmonize with him; but if you meet a noble-minded person, associate with him.”

Abū al-Dardāʾ said, “We smile to the faces of certain people but our hearts curse them.”

Shabīb ibn Shayba was asked about Khālīd ibn Ṣafwān and he answered, “He has no friend in secret and no enemy in public.”

Al-Aḥnaf said, “Many a man is beneficial even when he is absent, and many another is harmful to a person sitting with him despite the latter’s prudence.”

Kathīr ibn Harāsa said, “Some people decrease their esteem for you when you increase yours to them, and you become of little importance to them when you treat them as intimates. Satisfying them has no circumstance that you can foresee, and angering them has no circumstance that you should beware of. If you ever come to know such people in person, show them your affection and

deprive them of access to intimacy; showing them affection will prevent their evil, and depriving them of access to intimacy will ensure their respect for you.”

Al-ʿUtbi said in verse:

I have a friend who considers my rights over him
Non-essential, while his rights are an obligation.
If I cross the length of the country to go to him
Then walk the breadth of it to reach him,
He considers what I have done not much,
And wishes the earth was larger by one more earth.

About this type of people Diʿbil al-Khuzāʿi says:

Give them poison to drink, if you catch them,
And mix that with honey from your tongue.

Sahl ibn Hārūn wrote to Mūsā ibn ʿImrān about Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf:

When I ask you a favor for Abū al-Hudhayl,
My conscience is contrary to what I expressly say.
Treat him well, so that he may have a good opinion
[Of you] but without a benefit or a gift—
Until his miserable fortune and his pain are prolonged—
Then face him with a [negative] response.

Ṣāliḥ ibn ʿAbd al-Quddūs said:

Avoid an evil friend and cut off relations with him.
If you no have other alternative, cajole him.
Whosoever seeks a good deed from the unworthy
Will find it beyond the sea or at its bottom.
God has a paradise in the broad heavens,
But it is surrounded by loathsome difficulties.

Another poet said:

It is an affliction that resembles no other
To be an enemy of one who has no noble descent or religion.
He permits you to abuse his honor which he has not preserved
In order to be free in abusing your preserved honor.

A noble mare was shown to Abū Muslim, the leader of the [Abbasid] cause, so he asked his generals, “What good is this mare for?” They said, “We can ride it to raid the enemy.” He said, “No, but a man can ride it to escape from an evil neighbor.”

Blaming time

Wise men have said, “People were created with a natural disposition for blaming their time and being dissatisfied with their contemporaries.”

Of their sayings in this regard is, "People's satisfaction is an end that cannot be achieved."

And they said, "It is impossible to be safe from the tongues of the common people."

They also said, "People condemn and do not forgive, but God forgives and does not condemn."

In the Ḥadīth we read, "If a believer is as straight as an arrow, people will still say, 'He is not ...' and 'If it were not for ...'."

A poet said:

Whosoever mixes with people will not be safe from them:
They will chew him with their eyeteeth and molars.

ʿĀ'isha's saying about Labīd

Hishām ibn ʿUrwa related on the authority of his father that ʿĀ'isha said, "May God have mercy on Labīd. He used to say:

Those among whom one could happily live have gone,
And I remained among successors who are like scabby skin.

"What would he have said if he were to see our own time?"

ʿUrwa commented, "And we say, 'May God have mercy on ʿĀ'isha. What would she have said if she had reached our own time.'"

Someone used to say, "The men have gone and [only] monkeys remain." What would he have said if he had reached our own time?

Muslim ibn Yazīd ibn Wahb entered the presence of ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān, and the latter asked, "What was the time you lived that was best, and which of the kings was most perfect?" Muslim answered, "As for the kings, they were all either ones who praised or ones who blamed. With regard to time, it raises some people and lowers others; and they all blame it, because it wears out their new things, scatters their numbers, renders the young among them old, and puts to death the old ones."

A poet said:

O Time, if you have been hostile to us,
What you have done to us should suffice you.
You have made the evil ones the elite over us
Then turned your back on us after being friendly.

Another said:

If this time is the time of Taym
And ʿUkl, peace then be to Time.
It is a time in which the front has become the rear,
And the metal butt of a spear, the spearhead.
Perhaps our time will one day return to us,
Just as time has returned to Biṭān.

Abū Mayyās and people speaking of time

Abū Jaʿfar al-Shaybānī said, “Abū Mayyās, the poet, came to us one day as we were sitting in a group and he asked, ‘What are you doing and what are you discussing?’ We said, ‘We are speaking of time and of its viciousness.’ He said, ‘No. Time is only a vessel, and whatever good or evil is put in it remains what it is.’ Then he began to recite:

I see clothes preserved though worn by people,
And I see tatters trodden underfoot and not preserved.
They say Time has become bad,
But it is they who have become bad, not Time.”

Faraj ibn Sallām recited:

This is the time about which we were cautioned,
As has been related by Kaʿb and Ibn Masʿūd.
If it lasts, we shall not mourn anyone of us
Who dies and we shall not rejoice for a newborn.

Ḥabīb al-Ṭāʾī said:

I did not cry in a time whose quality I did not like,
But I cried over it after it was gone.

Another poet said about Ṭāhir ibn al-Ḥusayn:

If the whole world is to be won through Ṭāhir,
I will avoid everything that Ṭāhir has to do with it
And I will turn away from it in abstinence and nobility,
And will shelve it until the wind of change blows.

Muʾmin ibn Saʿīd said about Maʿqil al-Ḍabbī and his nephew ʿUthmān:

The world has become depraved and likewise its people;
Generous and virtuous people have become bored with it.
If the world is inclined to give its good things
To the likes of ʿUthmān and al-Muḥawwil,
Then damn the world and damn its good things,
And damn ʿUthmān and damn Maʿqil.

Muḥammad ibn Munādhīr said:

O seeker of poetry and grammar,
This time is corrupt to the core.
Its daytime is more desolate than its nighttime
And its stench is the most offensive stench.
Stop seeking grammar and don’t go after it,
Don’t compose poetry and don’t recite it.
Only a man who can perfectly “play music” and “sing”

Will pass muster these days,
 Or a pompous braggart whose speech is lying
 And who does no good and does not intend any.

Some of what I said on this theme is the following:

It is a hope, the nearest of which is farther than the clouds,
 And it is a promise which is like the shimmer of a mirage.
 This is an age in which slaves have become masters,
 And wolves have spread ruin in all parts.
 These are days void of all goodness,
 And this is a world which is divided among dogs.
 They are dogs who, if you ask them for soil,
 Will say, "We have no more soil."
 They will punish the one who speaks ill of them,
 And they will give him no reward if he does good.

Al-Jāhīz blaming time

‘Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāhīz wrote to one of his friends, blaming time:

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. May God preserve you like one whom He has led to contentment and employed in acts of obedience. I am writing to you as one whose worries have become dense, whose affairs have become difficult, and whose condition and way out of his irksome situation have become confusing. Those who have confidence in my loyalty and who praise the consequences of my friendship have become few because our times have changed, our days have been corrupted, and the mean ones among us have come to power. In the past, he who was modest, whose speech was truthful, who preferred fairness in his affairs, and cast off uncertainties in his dealings had full security, earned an abundance of well-being, and was spared bad consequences. We have looked at him as his condition has changed and his power has waned. We have found that his modesty has led to deprivation and his truthfulness has become a bane to his wealth, and that his thrift in asking and in not being insolent in demanding and wasting his honor in seeking dependence on others have all become an indication of his feeble-mindedness. A high favored position and [the receipt of] abundant benefactions have now become achievable by [utilizing] ignoble intentions and by seeking livelihood through abandoning dignity and accepting the dress of shame for oneself.

We have then looked at the one who has pursued our words and grinned at our argument, and we have set up for him a clear sign, a standing witness, and an evident light. We have found that the one who has clear meanness, shameful defects, extreme falsehood, glaring disparity, excessive ignorance, despicable weakness, feeble certainty and readiness, and who is quickly irascible and frivolous has perfected his joy, improved his affairs, and achieved success, good fortune, high position, obedient responses, and obeyed commands. If he errs, it

is said he is wise; if he makes a mistake, it is said he is right; and if he raves when he is awake, it is said he is seeing a truthful vision in a blessed sleep.

May God preserve you, this is our argument against whoever claims that ignorance debases, that stupidity demeans, that foolishness kills, that lying is harmful, and that difference derogates.

We have then looked at loyalty, honesty, nobility, skill, good conduct, perfect virtue, patience, and good nature, and at one who is highly learned, and in good control of himself and of his passions; and we have found So-and-So, the son of So-and-So. But we discovered that time has not done him justice and has not given him his due. We have found that his outstanding virtues are restraining him. This is evidence that badness is more useful than goodness, that the time of virtue has gone and has left no traces, and that the wheel of fortune has turned against him as it had turned against others before him. We have found that the one who has intelligence is miserable because of it, and that the one who is ignorant and stupid is fortunate because of his ignorance and stupidity. We have also found that poetry has spoken about time and expressed itself about life, where it says:

Be stupid with the stupid when you meet with them;
And face them with ignorance, as one who is ignorant.
Mince the truth when you meet one day with a falsifier
Who minces the truth and mixes it with jesting.
I have found that a man [today] is miserable because of his intelligence,
Much as he was happy on account of it in the past.

And so, may God preserve you, I have remained like a person in a hurry and ever ready to move, no desire of his being easy and no sleep being possible. I remained the victim of fears whose evils afflicted me from the morning and whose difficulties alternated all day. If my prayer could be heard and my imploration listened to, it would be for the great thudding collapse and the massive tremor [of the world's end]. My friend, I wish that the [trumpet] blowing and the sudden [eschatological] shout, which I find slow to come, would finally arrive and be done with. By God, no community has been tortured by a tremor, a wind, or a wrath as much as I was by experiencing exasperating irritation and by being witness to destructive stories: it is as if Time has taken upon itself the duty of torturing me and giving me pain. What is the value of a life when one cannot have joy with a real brother or with a compassionate friend, when one can start one's day only with the sight of a person whose sight is detestable and with the voice of a person whose face is distressing?

My friend, may God give me another abode and another home instead of my present one. My distress has been long, my grief has been prolonged; darkness has become pitch black, the lamp has been extinguished, and relief is slow. And peace [be upon you].

The Corruption of Friends

Abū al-Dardā' said, "People were leaves without thorns and have now become thorns without leaves."

ʿUrwa ibn al-Zubayr was asked, "Will you not move to Medina?" He replied, "There remains nobody in Medina except persons who envy others for blessings or persons who gloat over the misfortunes of others."

Al-Khushanī said, "Al-Riyāshī recited the following verses:

If magnanimity and loyalty are gone
And men of such qualities perish, leaving only scum,
And if Time hands me over to men
Who are like howling wolves:
Who are friends whenever I don't need them
And enemies when matters are grave,
When I come to them [for help] they push me away
As though I were a scabby person suffering from disease –
Then I say, and I should not be blamed for what I say,
'May all friends perish and be extinct.'

The wise have said, "Nothing is more wasteful than affection for someone who is not loyal, and friendliness to someone who is not thankful. A noble person loves another noble person on meeting him once, but a mean person does not establish a relationship with anyone except out of covetousness or fear."

In an Indian book, we read, "An evil man does not change, just as a bitter tree will only bear bitter fruit even if you daub it with honey."

A man heard Abū al-ʿAtāhiya recite the following:

Cast a look wherever you wish,
You will see only avaricious men.

So he said to him, "You have called all men avaricious!" Abū al-ʿAtāhiya rejoined, "Prove me to be a liar by showing me one generous man."

Abū al-ʿAtāhiya also said on this theme:

God bless your father! What a time
I've come to, and what a people!
Everyone weighs his affection for you carefully,
Giving you and taking from you by using a balance;
When he sees a mustard seed's overweight,
His affection goes to the outweighing scale.

And he said:

I see people whose faces are handsome
When they are in need of us.
But if we are in need of them,
Their handsome faces turn ugly to us.

If the miserly will withhold from us what they have,
We shall withhold from them what we have.

He also said:

They are our friends if they need us,
When we have no need for friends.

Al-Bakrī said:

I had a friend, whom I never betrayed,
Who unjustly dipped his hands in my blood.
He was my confidant in private and in public
And I was never on my guard against him for any important thing.
He concealed hatred by the use of loving words
And he deceitfully pretended to have love for me.
If he saw me, he said good things to me; but if
I was absent from him, he said evil things and maligned me.
When the occasion presented itself to him,
He unsheathed his sword to cut my throat,
Wanting to take my life, but fate betrayed him
By awakening those who had been about to sleep.

Al-ʿUtbi said:

If you are angry with me for no offense
And blame me although I committed no crime,
I'll seek to please you; but if that will be hard
I'll consider you dead although you are alive.
Don't be proud of what your hands possess,
For what my hands possess is more abundant.

Ibn Abi Ḥāzim said:

I had a friend who was to me (as I was to him)
More compassionate than a father to a son.
We were like one leg walking on a foot
Or like one arm connected to a forearm.
Then, when vicissitudes weakened my bones
And time depleted my strength,
He turned away from me, although he used to see
With my eyes and act with my arm and hand.

He also said:

A bosom friend, who used to humble himself to me,
Became wealthy, so he dissociated himself from me.
Having a proud soul which, if aroused, dared
To face spears, I said to him,

“I’ll exchange my hope in you for despair.”
 All who have found comfort have found it in despair.

‘Abd Allāh ibn Mu‘āwiya ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far said:

You are my friend so long as I don’t need you;
 If a need comes up, I am sure I will have no friend.
 The relationship between you and me continued
 After I tried you when there was need for you.
 Each of us is in no need of the other in his lifetime;
 And when we die, we will be less in need of each other.
 When satisfied, one’s eyes are blind to all faults;
 But when angry, one’s eyes see all shortcomings.

Al-Buḥturī said:

Shall I go east or go west, O Sa‘īd?
 Shall I diminish or augment my honorable conduct?
 Woes have afflicted me and sent me away from Naṣībīn;
 My luck in it has been manifestly bad,
 And Time has left me with men
 Whose faces and hands are [as crude as] iron.
 They wear beautiful clothes that are white
 But they have loathsome manners that are black.
 I wish that destinies were not predetermined,
 And that no blessings and no fortunes were given.

Ibn Abī Ḥāzim said:

They said, “If you only praised a generous man!”
 I said, “And how would I come by a generous man?
 I have tried, and have spent fifty years [trying] –
 And an experienced man knows best –
 But there is no one to be counted on for a day of beneficence
 And there is no one who gives to one in need.”

He also said:

I have tried all people without exception
 But have found no free man among them.
 The sweetness of people, in my view,
 Is bitter when it is tasted.

And he said:

Whoever forgets me,
 I’ll free myself from him.
 If he tries hard to relate to me,
 I’ll hasten with all effort to dissociate myself from him.

I only imitate my friend's act
 By an act like it.
 I will not do it again if he turns away from me
 As if I was one of his dependents.
 He will never see me
 Respect a man for his wealth.
 Nor will I derogate from someone
 Whose bad situation is understandable.
 I rather judge the latter
 And the former by their deeds.
 However Time deals with me,
 I will be one of its men.

We said the following verse on this theme:

O Abū Ṣāliḥ, heedlessness after heedlessness has come
 Upon people, and it isolated every generous man.
 I wish those isolated were ransomed by those who
 Sojourned, and a departed one were redeemed by a resident.
 I wish it had been the great [calamity], and our sky had folded
 And our earth had been spread out like a tanned skin.
 Death is nothing but the living of every miserly man,
 And living is nothing but the death of every blameworthy one.
 The biggest excuse for a generous man's sorrow
 Is seeing the world possessed by a stingy person.

Similar to this, we said the following on the same theme:

O Abū Ṣāliḥ, where are all the generous men?
 Tell me, generous man – for a generous man satisfies.
 Is it true what people say of the generosity of Ḥātim
 And of Ibn Sinān, who was qualified by liberality too?
 My excuse for [rebuking] people who molded themselves after them
 Is their stupidity, their shameful meanness, and their harshness.
 They are rocks of miserliness that grant nothing;
 Perhaps water may gush forth from solid rocks.
 But even if Moses came and beat them with his staff,
 The misers would not gush forth with anything.
 The existence of mean people is a death to them,
 Just as the death of the generous is their survival.
 It is hard for them that their hands give generously –
 May the Almighty God put an end to them.

Similar to this also, we said the following verses on the same theme:

A leg sways as if yearning for the sound of music,
 And above it pigeons sing.
 But poetry is lost on stupid Jarmaḳānīs,

All the same in their stinginess.
 Their shriveling hands are bound to their necks,
 May their hands and necks never be blessed.
 It is as if there is a covenant or a pact
 Between them to withhold giving from one who asks.
 How often have I tried to lead them by my praise poems
 Toward glorious heights, but they would not be led or driven!
 If I find no home in their quarters,
 The earth is wide for me and people are of many kinds.
 I am not the first thirsty person in a desert
 Who is deceived by its shimmering mirage.
 God provided them with wealth, satisfying them and annoying me,
 God is a Provider for the stupid and crazy.
 O close-fisted man, may your fist remain closed,
 For its fingers have nothing to give to people.
 Be absent, if you wish, till you are to be seen no more;
 Losing you does not disturb my inner feelings.
 The path of generosity leading to you is not open,
 Nor is the light of glory shining on you.
 Every hope I have ever pinned on you
 Has been flanked by humiliation and poverty.

Muʿammil ibn Saʿīd said the following on this theme:

What detracted from my worth is that
 I am not one of the prominent people of the city.
 There is no one among them who does not hate
 Or envy those with intelligence.
 They avoid meeting me as they would
 Avoid meeting a lion.
 My appearance in their eyes and in their souls
 Is heavier than Mount Uḥud.
 If they were to see me [drowning] in the middle of the sea,
 No one of them would raise a finger to help me.

A Chapter on Pride

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “God, may He be blessed and exalted, said, ‘Majesty is my wrap and grandeur is my garment. I shall break and humiliate anyone who contends in either of them with Me.’”

And he said, peace be upon him, “No proud person enters the presence of [Divine] Holiness.”

He also said, “The excess of a garment is in Hellfire.” This means: Whosoever drags the tail of his garment in pride will be led to Hellfire because of that.”

Al-Ḥasan saw ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Aḥtam strut in the mosque, so he said, "Look at this man: there is not a single organ of his body that God has not blessed and Satan has not cursed."

Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ said to his son, "Son, beware of pride. Let your knowledge of what you were and what you will become, be part of what you seek help from in order to abandon pride. How can you be proud, knowing the sperm from which you were created, the womb from which you were ejected, and the nourishment with which you were nourished."

Yaḥyā ibn Ḥayyān said, "When a noble person becomes strong, he humbles himself; and when a lowly person becomes strong, he becomes proud."

A wise man said, "How can pride abide in someone who has been created from earth, who contains filth, and takes the same course as urine."

Al-Ḥasan said, "I wonder at man, the son of Adam. How can he be proud when he has nine poisons in his body, all of which are pollutants."

Mentioning the proud, al-Ḥasan said, "You see one of them craning his neck, shaking his shoulders, hitting his hips, wallowing in falsehood, and saying, 'Here I am! Know me!' We know you, stupid! May God and the righteous hate you!"

ʿUyayna ibn Ḥiṣn stood at the door of ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, and pleaded, "Ask permission for me to enter and see the Commander of the Faithful, and say to him, 'The son of the good ones is at the door.' So ʿUmar permitted him to enter. When ʿUyayna entered, ʿUmar asked him, "Are you the son of the good ones?" ʿUyayna answered, "Yes." ʿUmar said, "You are rather the son of the evil ones. As for the son of the good ones, he is Joseph, son of Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham."

ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ḍabyān was told, "May God increase the number of men like you in the clan." He retorted, "You have asked of God that which is excessive."

A man of great pride from the tribe of ʿAbd al-Dār was asked, "Will you not come to the caliph?" He replied, "I am afraid the bridge [I have to cross to reach him] will not be able to carry my honor."

He was asked, "Will you not put on [additional] clothes, for it is extremely cold?" He replied, "My noble descent keeps me warm."

Al-Ḥajjāj on four men

Al-Ḥajjāj was asked, "How do you like your residence in Iraq, O commander?" He replied, "It is the best residence. If I can get hold of four men during it, I will be nearer to God, may He be praised and exalted, by spilling their blood." "And who are they?" he was asked again. He replied, "Muqātil ibn Mismaʿ, the ruler of Sijistān; for people came to him and he lavished money on them, so when he came to Basra, its people spread out their garments for him and he walked on them and said, 'For the like of this, let rulers rule.' And ʿUbayd ibn Ḍabyān; for he gave a sermon and was brief, so people in the mosque shouted, 'May God increase the number of men like you among us,' and he replied, 'You have

charged your Lord with that which is excessive.’ And Maʿbad ibn Zurāra; for he was one day sitting on the road when a woman passed by him and asked, ‘O servant of God, where is the road to such-and-such a place?’ So he bristled, ‘Woe to you! Is one like me to be addressed as a servant of God?’ And Abū al-Sammāk al-Ḥanafī; for he lost his she-camel and swore, ‘By God, if He will not return my she-camel to me, I will never pray.’”

The narrator of the story added, “Al-Ḥajjāj has forgotten to mention himself, for he is the fifth man after those four, and is rather of worse pride and of greater apostasy than they were. For when ‘Abd al-Malik once sneezed and his companions said to him, ‘God bless you,’ and he responded to them, al-Ḥajjāj wrote to him, ‘I have learned of the sneeze of the Commander of the Faithful and of his companions’ invocation of God’s blessing on him and of his response to them. *I wish I had been with them, to achieve great triumph.*’ [Q. 4:72] He also wrote to him, ‘A man’s *khalīfa* [= successor, e.g., a newborn son] in his family is dearer to him than his messenger [conveying the good news] to them. Likewise, O Commander of the Faithful, *khalīfas* [= caliphs, successors of Prophet Muḥammad] are of a higher status than [God’s] messengers.’”

Al-ʿUtbi said, “I saw Muḥriz, the client of Bāhila, riding a mule between al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa. Later on, I saw him walking on foot on the bridge of Baghdad. So I wondered, “Are you walking on foot in such a place as this?” He said, “Yes, I rode in a place where people walk [while on pilgrimage], it is therefore fit that God would make me walk on foot in a place where people ride.”

A wise man said to his son, “Son, you must make others feel welcome and you must exude joy to them, and beware of frowning and being proud. Free men find it preferable to be received in a manner they like and be given nothing, to being received in a manner they dislike and be given something. So pay attention to a trait that covers an act which looks like miserliness – and adopt it; and pay attention to a trait that effaces an act which looks like generosity – and avoid it. Have you not heard what Ḥātim al-Taʿī said:

I smile at my guest before he unloads his saddlebags,
And he meets with my fertility at a place that had been barren.
Fertility toward guests is not by increasing one’s hospitality,
For a generous man’s face is rather [the mark of] fertility.

Maḥmūd al-Warrāq said:

Pride is a cause of corrupting one’s religion, diminishing
One’s reason, and bringing about censure and indignation.
Withholding any giving while one’s face is cheerful is better
Than giving generously while one’s face is cheerless.

He also said:

The cheer of a miser can almost redeem his avarice,
And pride is a cause to corrupt every generous man

And it is a failing that lasts all his life
And an insult that attaches to his family and children.

Another poet said the following on pride:

Son of the earth, stay on the earth instead of flying high.
Do you hope to reach the position of the moon?
By God, I have never seen anyone soaring above –
Even if he reposed between Capricorn and Cancer –
Who was protected by the distant place from being hit
By the calamitous arrow of the vicissitudes of time.

Being indulgent in prosperity and humble in adversity

It was said, “Whoever becomes powerful when fortune favors him will be humiliated when misfortune afflicts him.”

It was also said, “Whoever is made vain by wealth will be humiliated by poverty.”

And it was said, “Whoever is assigned to a ruling position and thinks he is bigger than it, will not change because of it; and whoever is assigned to a ruling position and thinks it is bigger than he is, will change because of it.”

Yahyā ibn Hayyān said, “When a noble man becomes strong, he humbles himself; and when a lowly person becomes strong, he becomes proud.”

Chosroës said, “Beware of the might of the noble man when he is hungry, and that of the vile man when he is satiated.”

‘Alī ibn al-Jahm wrote to Ibn al-Zayyāt:

Abū Ja‘far, turn toward your companions
And lessen your extravagant pride a little.
If you have been given high standing today,
My hope and yours will be equal tomorrow.

‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Zurāra al-Kilābī said:

Bad times are surprised at him because
He is patient in bearing the difficulty of those worries.
If he receives anything, he does not rejoice; and he is not
Subdued or diminished by a disaster that afflicts him.

Al-Ḥasan ibn Hānī said:

I was sad but I did not die of sadness,
And I was joyful but I did not die of joy.

‘Aqīl ibn Abī Ṭālib wrote to his brother ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, peace be on him, and asked him how he was. ‘Alī, may God be pleased with him, wrote back saying:

If you ask me, "How are you?" I'll say,
 "I am steadfast and firm as Time bites me.
 It is difficult for me to be seen sorrowful,
 Letting a slanderer rejoice or a loved one feel hurt."

A chapter on humility

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, "Whosoever humbles himself to God will be elevated by God."

The wise have said, "Every blessing is envied except humility."

ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān said quoting the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, "The most virtuous men are those who humble themselves when in a high position, abstain from an [untoward] act when able to do it, and are fair when they are powerful."

Ibn al-Sammāk said to ʿIsā ibn Mūsā, "Your humility when you are a man of honor is greater than your honor itself."

The humility of the Negus

The Negus was sitting on the floor one morning while wearing the crown. His wondering patricians regarded that as a great act, and asked him for the cause that necessitated it. He said, "I have read among God's revelations to Christ, 'When I favor my servant with a blessing and he humbles himself, I will fulfill it.' Last night a son was born to me, so I humbled myself out of thankfulness to God."

ʿUmar and a woman from Quraysh

ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, went out, having laid his hand on al-Muʿallā ibn al-Jārūd al-ʿAbdī. A woman from Quraysh met him and said to him, "O ʿUmar." He stopped at her call and she said, "We used to know you for a while as ʿUmayr [in the diminutive form], then you became ʿUmar, and later you became Commander of the Faithful. Fear God, O Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, and look into the affairs of the people. For whoever fears [God's] threat finds what is distant at hand, and whoever fears death has a dread for its suddenness." Al-Muʿallā exclaimed, "O maiden of God! You have made the Commander of the Faithful weep." "Be silent," ʿUmar said to him. "Do you know who this woman is, woe to you? She is Khawla bint Ḥakīm, whose saying God has heard from His heaven. It is therefore more worthy of ʿUmar to listen to what she has said and be guided by it."

Abū ʿAbbād said, "Whenever a man sits down with me, I invariably imagine I will sit down with him again."

Al-Ḥasan was asked about humility and he said, "It is to go out of your home and, whenever you meet someone, think that he has superiority over you."

A man said to Bakr ibn ‘Abd Allāh, “Teach me to be humble.” Bakr said, “Whenever you see someone who is older than you, say, ‘He preceded me to adopting Islam and doing righteous deeds, and so he is better than I.’ And whenever you see someone who is younger than you, say, ‘I preceded him to committing sins and bad deeds, and so I am worse than he.’”

Abū al-‘Atāhiya said:

You who are honored by the world and its trappings,
Being honored is not the elevation of clay by clay.
If you seek a noble person among all the people,
Look for a king in the guise of a poor man.
For he is a man whose high-mindedness is great among people,
And he is good for the world and religion.

Kindness and patience

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “Whoever is given his fair share of kindness, has been given his fair share of what is good in this world and the hereafter.”

The wise have said, “One can achieve by kindness what cannot be achieved by violence. Don’t you see that water, despite its softness, cuts through the rock, despite its hardness?”

Ashja‘ ibn ‘Amr al-Sulamī said to Ja‘far ibn Yaḥyā ibn Khālid:

What you have achieved by kindness could not
Have been achieved by [the power of] men and money.

Al-Nābigha said:

Kindness is prosperity, and patience is happiness;
So be patient and kind: you will meet with success.

It was said, “Haste is a courier to error.”

Al-Qaṭāmī al-Taghlibī borrowed this theme and said:

An unhurried man may achieve some of what he needs,
And a man in haste may commit error.

‘Adī ibn Zayd said:

A man acting slowly may achieve some of his fortune,
And death may preclude the effort of a careful man.

A man’s comfort in divulging his secret to his friend

The Arabs say, “I have divulged to you my innermost affairs, and informed you of my visible and invisible flaws; if I had leprosy, I would not have kept it from you.”

God said, may He be blessed and exalted, “Every tiding has an appointed time.” [Q. 6:67]

The wise have said, “Every secret has a repository.”

They have also said, “Mutual keeping of secrets among the closest relatives is sheer recalcitrance.”

A poet said:

I have let ‘Amr in on some of my bosom feelings,
And have given him to drink of my bitter drink.
It is necessary for one to complain to a loyal, responsive man
When the secrets of one’s soul begin to abound and overflow.

Ḥabīb said:

I complained, although complaining is not a custom of one like me;
But one’s soul overflows when it becomes full.

Abū al-Ḥasan Muḥammad al-Baṣarī said:

Passion has played havoc with my distinguishing marks and traces,
And I have been buried alive under the ruins of my woes.
I complained of my worry, when I could bear it no more,
And he who complains of an oppressive worry can’t be blamed.

Another poet said:

When I can’t endure patience any more, I resort to complaining
And I call out desperately at night and whisper in soliloquy;
I rain tears on the surface of my cheeks, weeping onto
A burning heart that it may be quenched – but it will not.

Concluding from the eyes what is in the conscience

The wise have said, “The eye is the door of the heart, for what is in one’s heart appears in one’s eye.”

A saying by ‘Uthmān ibn Ibrāhīm

Abū Ḥātim said on the authority of al-Aṣma‘ī, who took it from Yūnus on the authority of Muṣ‘ab, who heard it from ‘Uthmān ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Muḥammad, who said, “I recognize in the eye [an indication] when it knows, when it disapproves, and when it neither knows nor disapproves. When it knows, it deepens; when it disapproves, it bulges; and when it neither knows nor disapproves, it is calm.”

Ṣarī‘ al-Ghawānī [the Belles’ Fallen Victim, Muslim ibn al-Walīd] said:

We have made the signals of love between us
Traps of vision that are more invisible than magic.

In them, I recognize love's reunion in the tenderness of the look,
And I recognize love's abandonment in the eye looking askance.

Maḥmūd al-Warrāq said:

The eyes are witnesses to the hearts:
Evident are those that hate you and so too, those that love you.
When eyes look into each other, they negotiate
And they converse about what the hearts conceal.
They speak although the mouths are silent,
Their innocence or their guilt is not concealed from you.

Ibn Abi Ḥāzim said:

Take from living what suffices
And from Time what is pure.
The eye of one who does not like a love
Relationship with you will show aversion to you.

On this theme, we said:

A companion is false in love,
His tears flow in yearning.
All that his ribs conceal
Is written in his eyes.

[Abū Nuwās] al-Ḥasan ibn Hānīʿ said:

With my eye, I scare away the bird of [my friend's] eye;
And so, virtually no thought is concealed from me.

Concluding from one's thoughts what is in another person's thoughts

A wise man wrote to another wise man, "If you want to know what feelings I have for you, put your hand on your chest; and as you find me there, I will find you likewise."

It was said, "Beware of those whom your hearts hate, for hearts requite other hearts."

Dhū al-Iṣbaʿ said:

I don't ask people about what feelings they have in their hearts;
What feelings I have for them in my heart is sufficient for me.

Maḥmūd al-Warrāq said:

Don't ever ask a person about what he feels in his heart:
From your own heart, you can copy what is in his.

If there is hatred [in his heart], a similar feeling is in yours;
Or if there is love, he is already a winner of your love.

Having correct supposition

‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ was asked, “What is rationality?” He replied, “Having correct supposition and knowing what will be on the basis of what has been.”

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said, “Whoever cannot benefit from his supposition cannot benefit from his certainty.”

‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, said, “God bless Ibn ‘Abbās. He used to see the Invisible through a thin veil.”

A poet said:

Hardly does a hateful thing surprise a person
Who can perceive causes leading to a variety of evils.

God has given rationality to man to the exclusion of other animals so that he may draw conclusions from what is visible about what is hidden and understand much from the little he is given.

We have said on this theme:

O heedless man who sees nothing but his own good qualities
And who, if he knows better, should only see his bad ones:
Look into the inner dimensions of the world,
For all beasts can see its outer dimensions with their eyes.

Favoring relatives and preferring acquaintances

Al-Shaybānī said, “The first [Muslim ruler] to favor relatives and friends [in official dealings] was ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān, may God be pleased with him.”

He also said, “‘Umar used to withhold [official dealings] from his relatives in an attempt to seek God’s satisfaction. No better [ruler] than ‘Umar has ever been seen.”

When [‘Uthmān] gave asylum to [al-Ḥakam ibn Abī al-‘Āṣ], exiled [to al-Ṭā’if] by the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, he said that people would not be resentful against him because he had helped a blood relative and brought an uncle close.

Mu‘āwiya was told, “Your chamberlain favors his acquaintances and friends over the honorable people and notables in giving them permission to enter [into your presence].” He retorted, “Woe to you. Acquaintance is beneficial to a ferocious dog and a biting camel. How much more it is to a man of good descent, honor, and religion!”

A man said to Ziyād, “May God mend the ways of the commander. This person boasts of a status he claims he has received from you.” “Yes,” said Ziyād,

“and let me tell you what benefit he gets from that: if he has a rightful claim on you, I will obligate you to it with severity; and if you have one on him, I will discharge it on his behalf.”

A poet said:

I say to my neighbor when he comes to dispute
A claim, either rightly or wrongly,
“If my good does not reach you, when you are my neighbor,
My evil will not reach you either.”

‘Abd Allāh al-Qasrī’s saying as judge of Basra

Al-ʿUtbi said, “‘Abd Allāh ibn Khālīd ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Qasrī was in charge of the judgeship of al-Basra and used to be partial to the people he liked. He was told, ‘What a man you are, except that you are partial!’ ‘What good is a friend,’ he said, ‘if he does not give his friend part of his own religion?’”

Ibn Shubruma assumed the judgeship of Basra unwillingly but he did fairly well. When he was dismissed, his close and loving friends came to see him, and he said to them, “By God, I have assumed this position unwillingly and I have been dismissed from it unwillingly. In all that, I was only afraid that someone who did not know the rights of these people would be their judge.” Then he cited a poet’s following verses:

Neither does prison make me weep nor do fetters restrain me,
Nor am I concerned about the fear of death.
I am rather afraid for certain people who,
When I die, will be dealt what I used to prevent.

The common people say, “The ruler’s love for you is more useful to you than the witnesses [found] among you.”

A poet said:

If the ruler is your opponent,
He will not accept your witnesses.

Ziyād said, “I like ruling for three reasons and I hate it for three reasons. I like it in order to benefit friends, harm enemies, and acquire things cheaply; and I hate it because of the alarm of the courier, the fear of being deposed, and the gloating of the enemy.”

The wise have said, “The most worthy of sharing your blessings are those who share your misfortunes.”

A poet has borrowed this theme and said:

The most worthy friend to console when you are joyful
Is indeed the one who has consoled you in your sorrow.
When honorable people come into an easy life, they remember
Those who were on intimate terms with them in hard times.

Ḥabīb said:

God considers ugly an enmity that cannot be guarded against,
And a love that is openly expressed but is not useful.

The merit of [belonging to] a clan

‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, said, “A man’s clan is more beneficial to him than he is to the clan; for if he can restrain one enemy from them, they can restrain many from him and meanwhile [he can] retain their love, protection, and help. A man will indeed rise to defend another whom he does not know except by his lineage. I will cite to you a few verses on this from the Book of God, Most High. God, Almighty and Most Exalted, said quoting Lot, ‘Would that I had power against you or could take refuge in a strong support’ [Q. 11:80]; he meant a clan, for Lot had no clan. By Him who holds my soul in His hand, God has not sent a prophet after him except in the plenitude of his people and within the protection of his clan. Then He mentioned Shu‘ayb, when his people said to him, ‘We see that you are weak among us. Were it not for your tribe, we would have stoned you’, [Q. 11:91] for he was blind; by God, they feared no one but his clan.”

Buzurjimihr was asked, “What do you think about one’s cousin?” He replied, “He is your enemy and your enemy’s enemy.”

Debts

‘Ā’isha related that the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “A debt diminishes a man of noble birth.”

‘Umar said, “Lo, al-Usayfi’ of the tribe of Juhayna was satisfied, with regard to his religion and honesty, that it be said he had arrived ahead of the pilgrims. To do so, he had borrowed money irresponsibly [to buy expensive and fast camels] and had become heavily and inextricably indebted. Whoever has a financial claim on him, let him come to us in the early morning; and we will divide al-Usayfi’'s money among his debtors. Beware of debts: they begin with worry and end in sadness.”

A client of the tribe of Quḍā’a said:

If I were a client of Qays ‘Aylān, you would not find
That I was indebted by even a dirham to any human being.
But I am a client of all of Quḍā’a
So I don’t care that I am indebted and you pay the debt.

Another poet said:

If you settle a debt by incurring another debt, this is not
A settlement but rather a debt added to another debt.

Sufyān al-Thawrī said, “A debt is a worry at night and a humiliation by day. If God wishes to humiliate a man, He hangs a debt like a necklace around his neck.”

ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, saw a man wearing a mask and said to him, “The wise man Luqmān used to say, ‘A mask is a [cause of] suspicion at night, and a humiliation by day.’ The masked man said, ‘Wise man Luqmān was not in debt.’”

Al-Muqannaʿ al-Kindī said:

My people reprove me because I have incurred debts, but
I borrowed money for things that would bring them praise.
If they eat my flesh, I will spare theirs;
And if they destroy my glory, I will build up theirs.

Lies and breaking of promises

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “Lying skirts faith.”

The wise have said, “A liar has no sense of honor.”

They also said, “One who is known for lying cannot possibly be believed.”

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “Lying is not permissible either in serious talk or in jesting.”

And he also said, “A [true] believer is never a liar.”

ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar said, “Breaking a promise is one-third of hypocrisy.”

Ḥabīb al-Tāʾī said about ʿAyyāsh:

Among people, you promise most but you break your promises;
And, among people, you offer words most but they are lies.

We said the following verses on the same theme:

It is a sheet in which “I wish” and “Perhaps” are exhaustively used.
Its title gives rest to one who hopes, after being desperate.
It has a promise that raises a notion in my heart, of which
My inner feelings are weary because of long confinement.
They are promises whose shining brilliance deceived me
So I stretched out my hand to it to seek its light,
And was shocked to feel a rock which, even if you struck it
With Moses’ staff, would not gush forth because it was vile.
It is as if the rock was fashioned of miserliness and mendacity:
The former was its soul and the latter its breath.

Rising above listening to obscenities and telling them

Know that a listener to the one who speaks evil is a partner of his. God said, “... listeners to falsehood.” [Q. 5:42]

Al-ʿUtbi said:

My father related to me that Saʿd al-Qaṣīr had said, “‘Amr ibn ‘Utba looked at me as a man was reviling another in front of me and said, ‘Woe to you!’ – and he had never said to me ‘Woe to you’ before that moment – ‘Let your hearing rise above listening to obscenities just as you let your tongue rise above telling them; for the listener is a partner of the speaker. The latter resorts to the worst in his vessel and empties it into your own. If a [perverse] word said by an ignorant fool is immediately repelled, the one who repels it feels happy and the one who has said it feels miserable.’”

A chapter on excess in religiosity

At the time of ‘Umar ibn Dharr, a man died who had been an excessive sinner and had gone beyond all proper bounds, and so people shunned his funeral. But ‘Umar ibn Dharr attended it and performed the ritual funerary prayers for him. When the dead man was lowered into his grave, ‘Umar said, “May God have mercy on you, Abū So-and-So. You have spent your life believing in one God and soiled your forehead in prostration to Him. If people say you are a sinner and have committed many transgressions, who of us is not a sinner with many transgressions?”

Relating a *ḥadīth* about the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, Abū Hurayra said, “God has commanded believers to do what He commanded His Messengers to do, for He said, ‘O Messengers, eat of the good things and do righteous deeds.’ [Q. 23:42] He also said, ‘O you who believe, eat of the good things We have provided for you.’ [Q. 2:172] Then he gave the example of a man who would usually be seen disheveled and dust-covered, raising his hands to Heaven and saying, ‘Lord, Lord,’ while he regularly ate forbidden food, drank forbidden drink, and wore forbidden clothing. [And the Prophet asked,] ‘How in the world would his prayer be ever answered?’”

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “God has sent me to convey the true tolerant religion, not a heretical monasticism. My tradition is prayer and sleep, fast and fast-breaking. Whoever dislikes my tradition does not belong to me.”

He also said, may God bless him and grant him peace, “This religion is strong, and so enter deep into it gently; for a camel-rider who cuts himself off from the caravan by going fast ahead will eventually neither cover distance nor preserve his camel’s back.”

‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, said, “The best of this religious community is this middle model of men, to whom a zealot will return and with whom a slow follower will catch up.”

Muṭarrif ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Shikhhīr said to his son, who had become a devout person, “Son, a good deed lies between two bad ones,” – he meant religiosity lies between excess and dereliction – “the best things are the middle ones, and the worst kind of walk is to prance and strut.”

Salmān al-Fārisī said, “With purpose and persistence, you will be the winning horse.”

It was said, “The one who does a good deed is like the one who eats food: if he eats from it for subsistence, it will preserve him; but if he overeats from it, it will cause him surfeit.”

In a report on Jesus, the son of Mary, peace be upon him, we read that he met a man and asked him, “What do you do [for a living]?” The man said, “I devote myself [to God].” “Who takes care of you?” Jesus asked. “My brother,” the man replied. Jesus said, “He is more devout than you.”

Similar to this is a report about a group of men from the tribe of Ash‘ar who were on a trip. When they returned, they said, “After you, O Messenger of God, we have never seen a man who is more virtuous than So-and-So. He fasted during the day, and when we camped, he remained up all night [performing devotional exercises] until we resumed our trip.” “And who used to serve him and take care of him?” asked the Prophet. “We all did,” they replied. The Prophet said, “You are all better than he.”

Al-Zuhri was asked, “What is asceticism?” “It is not having disheveled hair,” he replied, “nor is it having rough appearance. It is rather restraining one’s soul from desire.”

‘Alī ibn ‘Āṣim said on the authority of Abū Ishāq who had heard al-Shaybānī say, “I saw Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīyya pausing at ‘Arafāt as he was on the back of a nag and wearing a yellow silk shawl.”

Al-Suddī said on the authority of Ibn Jurayj who had heard this from ‘Uthmān ibn Abī Sulaymān that Ibn ‘Abbās used to wear a cloak valued at one thousand [dirhams].

Ismā‘īl ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far said on the authority of his father, “I saw God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, wearing two pieces of clothing dyed with saffron: a cloak and a turban.”

Ma‘mar said, “I saw Ayyūb al-Sikhtiyānī wearing a robe which almost touched the ground. I asked him about that and he said, ‘In the past, it was a well-known custom to have a trailing robe; today, the custom is to tuck it up.’”

Abū Ḥātim said on the authority of al-Aṣma‘ī, “Ibn ‘Awn bought a tall headgear and passed by Mu‘adha al-‘Adawiyya [wearing it]. ‘Someone like you wears this?’ she wondered. I mentioned that to Ibn Sirīn and he said, ‘Why didn’t you tell her that Tamīm al-Dāri bought a complete suit of clothing for one thousand [dirhams] and performed the ritual prayer wearing it.’”

When Ḥammād ibn Salama came to Basra, Farqad al-Sabakhī went to see him wearing woolen clothes. So he said to him, “Quit this Christianity of yours!” Farqad replied, “We used to see Ibrāhīm [ibn Yazīd al-Nakha‘ī, the legist,] come out to us wearing a robe dyed with safflower and we [even] believed that eating carrion or the meat of an unlawfully slaughtered animal was legal for him.”

Abū al-Ḥasan al-Madā‘inī said, “Muḥammad ibn Wāsi‘ entered the presence of Qutayba ibn Muslim, governor of Khurāsān, wearing a woolen jacket. So

the governor said to him, 'What makes you wear this?' Muḥammad remained silent so Qutayba said to him, 'I am talking to you, and you don't answer me?' Muḥammad said, 'I hate to say I am wearing it out of asceticism, for I would be justifying myself; and [I hate] to say I am wearing it out of poverty, for I would be complaining of my Lord. There is no answer to you but silence.'

Ibn al-Sammāk said to those who wore woolen clothing, "By God, if your clothing is in accordance with your consciences, you like to show off to people; and if it is contrary to your consciences, you have attained perdition."

Al-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad used to wear silk and Sālim ibn 'Abd Allāh, wool. They used to sit in the mosque of Medina, and neither of them disapproved of what the other was wearing.

A man entered the presence of Muḥammad ibn al-Munkadir and found him sitting on double cushions while a slave-girl was spraying perfume on him. "May God have mercy on you!" the man said, "I have come to ask you about something and found you practicing it," – he meant preening oneself. Muḥammad said, "This is what I found the people practicing."

Al-A'mash performed the ritual prayer in the mosque of a certain people and their imam prolonged the prayer. When he ended it, al-A'mash said to him, "Don't prolong your prayer, man; for there may be behind you a person in need, an old man, and a weak one." The imam said, "... and it is hard indeed, except for the humble in spirit." [Q. 2:45] Al-A'mash pleaded, "I am the messenger of 'the humble in spirit' to you; they don't need this from you."

Al-Rabī' ibn Ziyād and 'Alī regarding 'Āṣim

Al-'Utbi said:

Al-Rabī' ibn Ziyād had been hit by an arrow in his forehead and the pain from the wound used to come back to him every year. 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib came to visit him and asked, "How are you, Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān?" Al-Rabī' replied, "If the pain I have would go away by nothing but the loss of my sight, I would wish to lose my sight." "And how valuable is your sight to you?" asked 'Alī. "If I possessed the whole world," Al-Rabī' replied, "I would redeem my sight with it." "No doubt, God will give you as much as the whole world," 'Alī commented, "but if you possessed that much, you would spend it in the way of God. God rather gives in accordance with one's pain and misfortune, and He still has a multifold of gifts." "Commander of the Faithful," al-Rabī' said, "I would like to complain to you about 'Āṣim ibn Ziyād." "What is the matter with him?" asked 'Alī. "He took up wearing a cloak," al-Rabī' complained, "and abandoned wearing the wrap, thus causing his family grief and his children, sorrow." "Bring 'Āṣim to me," 'Alī ordered. When 'Āṣim came, 'Alī frowned at him and said, "Woe to you, 'Āṣim! Do you think God has permitted pleasures to you when He rather hates that you partake of them? You are less important to God than that. Have you not heard Him say, 'He has spread out the two seas that

meet together, between them is a barrier they do not overpass' [Q. 55:20] until He says, 'From them come out pearls and coral.' [Q. 55:22] By God, the degradation of God's blessings by deeds is preferable to me than their degradation by speech, for I have heard Him say, 'And as for your Lord's blessing, proclaim it' [Q. 93:11] and 'Say, "Who has forbidden the ornament of God which He has produced for His servants, and the good things of His providing?"'" [Q. 7:32] 'Āṣim remonstrated, "Why then, O Commander of the Faithful, have you restricted yourself to wearing rough clothing and eating hard bread?" 'Alī responded, "God has prescribed that just rulers should consider themselves in relation to the common people, so that the poor may not see their poverty as ugly as it is." Soon after leaving, 'Āṣim wore a wrap and abandoned the cloak.

**The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace,
and 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Amr whose wife had complained about him**

Muḥammad ibn Ḥaṭīb al-Jumāhī said:

Someone who had heard 'Amr ibn Shu'ayb, whom both my father and I had also heard, said, "'Amr ibn Shu'ayb related to me on the authority of his father who had heard it from 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd who said, 'God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, came one day to the mother of 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Amr ibn al-Āṣ – and she was a woman who used to be kind and friendly to God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace – and he said to her, "How are you, Umm 'Abd Allāh?" "How would you expect me to be," she said, "when 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Amr is a man who has abandoned the world?" "And how is that?" he asked. She replied, "He denies himself sleep; he does not sleep, he does not break his fast, he does not eat meat, and he does not render his [conjugal] duty to his wives." "Where is he?" the Prophet asked. She said, "He has gone out and will soon return." "When he returns," the Prophet said, "keep him in for me." Then God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, left. 'Abd Allāh returned, and later God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, came back and said to him, "What is this I hear about you, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Amr, that you do not sleep?" "And what is that, O Messenger of God?" The Prophet continued, "I have heard you do not sleep and do not break your fast." 'Abd Allāh said, "My intention in that is to achieve safety from the greatest fear [on Judgment Day]." "And I have heard you don't eat meat," the Prophet continued. "My intention in that is to obtain what is better than meat in Paradise." "And I have heard you don't render your duty to your wives," the Prophet added. 'Abd Allāh said, "My intention is to obtain [in Paradise] women who are better than they are." God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, then said, "O 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Amr, you have a good example in God's Messenger. God's Messenger fasts and breaks his fast, he eats meat, and renders to his family their due rights. O 'Abd Allāh, God has a right over you, your body has a right over you, and your family has a right over you." 'Abd Allāh asked, "Messenger of God, how many days do you command

that I fast: five days, and break the fast on one day?” “No,” the Prophet said. “Shall I then fast four days, and break the fast on one day?” he asked. “No,” the Prophet said. “Shall I then fast three days, and break the fast on one day?” he asked. “No,” the Prophet said. “Then two days, and break the fast on one day?” “No,” the Prophet said. “Then one day?” he pleaded. The Prophet said, “That was the fast of my brother, [the Prophet] David. O ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Amr, what do you think your condition will be when you remain with a scum of people whose agreements and compacts have been broken and have become like this?” – and he opposed his fingers to one another. ‘Abd Allāh asked, “What then do you command me to do, O Messenger of God?” “Accept what you know and reject what you disapprove of,” the Prophet said, and he added, “Do as your conscience dictates, and leave people and their common affairs.” Then he took ‘Abd Allāh’s hand, walked with him, and put his hand in his father’s, saying, “Obey your father.” At the Battle of Şiffin, his father ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ said to him, ‘Abd Allāh, go out and fight.’ ‘Father,’ he said, ‘do you order me to go out and fight, knowing that I heard from God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, what I did and knowing that he entrusted me with what he did?’ ‘I beseech you by God,’ his father said, ‘was not the last thing he told you as he took you by the hand and placed your hand in mine, “Obey your father”?’ ‘Abd Allāh said, ‘God, yes.’ His father said, ‘I therefore adjure you to go out and fight.’ And so, ‘Abd Allāh went out and fought, using two swords.”’”

Belief in predestination

Muḥammad ibn al-Munkadir

A group of people came to Muḥammad ibn al-Munkadir and said to him, “Are you the one who believes God will punish creatures in accordance with what He predestined for them?” He turned his face away from them and did not answer them. “May God make you prosper,” they said, “If you don’t answer us, don’t deprive us of the blessing of invoking God for us.” He said, “O God, don’t put us to death by your punishment, don’t let your ruse deceive us, and don’t censure us for negligence in striving to obtain your satisfaction. Accept our few [good] deeds and forgive our abundant sins. You are God, before whom there was nothing and after whom there will be nothing. You are master of all things. You raise whomever you like by Your guidance. The one who does good does not dispense with Your help, the one who does evil does not defeat you, and nothing is beyond Your rule and Your power – there is no refuge but in You. How can we obtain forgiveness [from anyone] when it is only in Your hands? And how can we obtain mercy [from anyone] when it is only with You? You are mindful, and You forget nothing; You are eternal, and You don’t get old; You are living, and You don’t die. Through You, we have come to know You; by You, we have been guided to You; without You, we would not know what You

are. Praise be to You, and may You be exalted.” The people said, “By God, he has spoken well and has not been remiss.”

He also said, “Predestination was mentioned in Ḥasan al-Baṣrī’s presence and he said, ‘God created creatures in order to try them. They don’t obey Him by coercion, and they don’t disobey Him by defeating Him. He does not deprive them of ownership [of their deeds]: He is capable of doing what He made them capable of doing, and He is the owner of what he made them own. If human beings are willing to obey God, He does not thwart their will but He rather increases their guidance and piety. If they opt to disobey God, He is capable of turning them away from that if He wills; and if He leaves them free to disobey, He does that after warning them and excusing Himself [for punishing them].’”

Ghaylān and Rabīʿa

Marwān ibn Mūsā said, “Abū Ḍamra related to us that Ghaylān came to Rabīʿa, having composed a [theological] question. He stood before him and asked, ‘Are you the one who claims that God loves to be disobeyed?’ Rabīʿa rejoined, ‘You are the one who claims that God is disobeyed [by human beings] under compulsion.’ [Ghaylān was dumbfounded] and it was as if Rabīʿa had fed him a stone.”

Ṭāwūs was told, “Qatāda likes to come and see you.” “If he does,” Ṭāwūs said, “I shall rise and go.” He was told, “But he is a knowledgeable jurisprudent.” He said, “The Devil is more knowledgeable than he is, for he said, ‘My Lord, since You have tempted me ...’” [Q. 15:39]

Al-Shaʿbī was asked, “Have you seen Qatāda?” “Yes,” he said, “I saw swept garbage between two latrines.”

Predestination [*qadar*] is [alternatively called] knowledge [*ʿilm*], the book [*kitāb*], the word [*kalima*], permission [*idhn*], and will [*mashīʾa*] [in the Qurʾān].

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, “I asked a bedouin Arab, ‘What merit has the tribe of So-and-So over the tribe of So-and-So?’ He said, ‘The book [*kitāb*],’ meaning predestination [*qadar*].”

Almighty and Exalted God said, “Verily, We have created everything in measure [*bi-qadar*]. [Q. 54:49] And He said, “All is in a manifest book [*kitāb*].” [Q. 11:6] He also said, “And Our word [*kalima*] has already gone forth to Our servants, the Messengers” [Q. 37:171] – meaning predestination. And He said, “And had it not been for a word [*kalima*] already gone forth from Your Lord, it [punishment] would have been inevitable.” [Q. 20:129]

Al-Khushanī on al-Aʿshā and Labīd

Al-Khushanī Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Salām said, “There were two master poets in the Jāhiliyya period: one of whom believed in God’s justice [and man’s free will], and the other in fatalism [and man’s predestination]. The poet believing in God’s justice was al-Aʿshā of the tribe of Bakr, where he says:

God alone has chosen fidelity and justice,
And He has laid the blame on man.

The poet believing in fatalism was Labid ibn Rabīʿa, where he says:

Piety toward our Lord is the best gift.
In God's permission, there is tarrying and there is haste.
Whomever He guides in the ways of good will be guided
Happily, and whomever He wishes, He will let go astray.

Iyās ibn Muʿāwiya

Iyās ibn Muʿāwiya said, "I spoke with all the [theological] groups using part of my mind, but I spoke with the believer in predestination using *all* my mind and I said to him, 'Your interference with what does not belong to you would be an injustice on your part, [wouldn't it]?' 'Yes,' he agreed. I said, 'But everything belongs to God!'"

Almighty and Exalted God said regarding predestination, "Say: To God belongs the conclusive argument; if He had so willed, He would have guided you all." [Q. 6:149] And He said, "They consider it a favor to you that they have adopted Islam. Say: Do not consider your adoption of Islam as a favor to me; it is rather God who has conferred a favor upon you, in that He has guided you to belief, if you are truthful." [Q. 49:17]

Ibn Shihāb said, "God revealed to His Prophet a verse about the Qadarites [believers in free will], 'Those who said of their brethren, while they themselves remained behind, *If they had obeyed us, they would not have been killed.* Say: Then avert death from yourselves, if you are truthful.'" [Q. 3:168] And He said, "Say: If you had remained in your homes, those [among you] for whom being killed had been decreed would have gone forth to their deathbeds [anyway]." [Q. 3:154]

Muḥammad ibn Sirīn said, "The Qadarites do not deny that it is possible for God to know a matter about His creatures and decree that it should happen to them."

A man said to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, "What do you think of predestination?" He said, "Woe to you! Tell me about God's mercy: was it [exercised] before His servants had obeyed Him?" The man said, "Yes." ʿAlī remarked [to the listeners], "Your friend has become a Muslim and was an unbeliever earlier." The man asked, "Is it not with the First Will by which He created me that I stand up and sit down, that I close and open [my hand]?" ʿAlī said to him, "You are still within His Will. Now let me ask you about three things. If your answer to any one of them is 'No', you are an unbeliever; and if your answer is 'Yes', you are what you are." The people around him stretched out their necks in order to listen to what he would say. ʿAlī said, "Tell me about yourself, has God created you as you wished or as He wished?" The man said, "As He wished." ʿAlī asked, "Did He create you for what you wished or for

what He wished?" "For what He wished," the man replied. 'Alī then asked, "On the Day of Resurrection, will you come up to Him with what you wish or with what He wishes?" "With what He wishes," the man replied. 'Alī concluded, "You see: you have no will."

Hishām, Ghaylān, and al-Awzāʿī

Hishām ibn Muḥammad al-Sāʿib al-Kalbī said:

[Caliph] Hishām ibn 'Abd al-Malik disapproved of Ghaylān's belief in predestination and argued fiercely with him about that. In one of his threats to him, he said, "I don't think you will stop [believing in predestination] until 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz's imprecation befalls you, for he argued against you regarding God's will by quoting the saying of Almighty and Exalted God, 'And you do not will unless God wills.' [Q. 76:30] But you claimed that you did not pay attention to it, so 'Umar said, 'O God, if he is lying, cut off his hand, his leg, and his tongue, and cut off his head.' Therefore desist, for this is better for you; and leave off a matter whose harm to you is closer than its benefit." Ghaylān defied Hishām, miserable man that he was and seeking his own death, and said, "Commander of the Faithful, bring me someone who will speak with me and debate. If my argument persuades him, you will withhold punishment from me and have no way to hurt me; and if his argument persuades me, I will ask you by Him who has honored you with the caliphate to implement 'Umar's imprecation against me." This infuriated Hishām and he sent for al-Awzāʿī and explained to him what Ghaylān had said and what he had answered Ghaylān. Al-Awzāʿī turned to Ghaylān and said, "Shall I ask you about five or three things?" Ghaylān said, "About three." Al-Awzāʿī began, "Did you know that God freed [men] to do what He has prohibited?" Ghaylān said, "No, I didn't know – and this would be abominable to Him." Al-Awzāʿī said, "And did you know that God permitted what He had forbidden?" Ghaylān replied, "This is more abominable. No, I have no knowledge of this." Al-Awzāʿī said, "And did you know that God prevented what He had commanded to be done?" Ghaylān said, "He prevented what He had commanded to be done? No, I didn't know." Al-Awzāʿī concluded, "This man is to be considered a suspect and one of the people of error." So Hishām ordered that Ghaylān's hand and leg be amputated, and then he was thrown into the garbage. The people surrounded him, wondering at God's great vengeance with which he had been afflicted. A man, who had often criticized Ghaylān for his speech about predestination, came and made his way through the crowd until he reached him and said, "O Ghaylān, remember 'Umar's imprecation!" Ghaylān said, "Hishām has therefore succeeded. If what has befallen me is because of 'Umar's imprecation or a former decree, there is no objection to what Hishām had ordered to be done [to me]." His words reached Hishām, who then ordered that Ghaylān's tongue and head be cut off to complete [the effect of] 'Umar's imprecation. Hishām turned to al-Awzāʿī and said, "Abū 'Amr, explain what you have said." Al-Awzāʿī said, "Yes. *He*

permitted what he had forbidden: He had forbidden Adam to eat from the tree, and then permitted him to eat from it; *He prevented what He had commanded to be done*: He commanded the Devil to prostrate himself to Adam, and then prevented him from doing that; *He freed [men] to do what He had prohibited*: He had prohibited eating carrion, and then freed [men] to eat it in case of emergency.”

Ibn Abī ‘Arūba and Qatāda

Al-Riyāshī said on the authority of Sa‘īd ibn ‘Āmir, who took it from Juwayriya on the authority of Sa‘īd ibn Abī ‘Arūba, “When I asked Qatāda about predestination, he said, ‘Do you want the opinion of the Arabs or that of the Persians?’ ‘Rather the opinion of the Arabs,’ I replied. He said, ‘There was no Arab who did not firmly believe in predestination.’ Then he recited the following:

My crossing of every wasteland was nothing
But a book of the past, that had been written.

A bedouin Arab said, “Someone looking into God’s predestination is like someone looking at the sun: he can perceive its light but cannot with certainty delineate its limits.”

Ka‘b ibn Zuhayr said:

If I were to wonder at anything, I would wonder
At man’s effort, even as his destiny is concealed.
Man makes an effort to achieve things but never reaches them,
His soul is single but his concerns are a multitude.
So long as he is alive, hope is stretched out before him;
His vision has no end until his physical being ends.

Another poet said:

Good luck is more profitable to a man than his intellect.
So profit from good luck in events, or [if luckless] leave them.
How near things are when driven to you by destiny,
And how far they are when they are not destined!

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, and a Qadarite

‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Qaṣīr said, “Yūnus ibn Bilāl related to us on the authority of Yazid ibn Abī Ḥabīb that a man asked the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, ‘O Messenger of God, does God predestine that I do evil and then punish me?’ The Prophet replied, ‘Yes, and you are more unjust,’” [that is, for presuming to ask].

Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Muqri’ related to me, quoting Abū Hurayra on the authority of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, who had heard it from God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace,

“Don’t sit with people who believe in free will and don’t enter into discussions with them.”

In a report by ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mas‘ūd, he said, “There was never unbelief after a prophecy which did not have disbelief in free will as its key.”

Abū al-‘Atāhiya and Ibn Ashras before al-Ma’mūn

Thumāma ibn Ashras related the following:

When [poet] Abū al-‘Atāhiya came to Iraq, he entered the presence of al-Ma’mūn who ordered that some money be given to him and often conversed with him [thereafter]. One day Abū al-‘Atāhiya said to al-Ma’mūn, “There is nobody in the world more ignorant than the Qadarites [believers in free will].” “You are more knowledgeable about your own trade,” al-Ma’mūn warned, “therefore don’t go beyond it to another.” “Commander of the Faithful,” Abū al-‘Atāhiya said, “convene a meeting where I can meet [for a debate] with any one of them you wish.” So al-Ma’mūn sent for me. When I entered his presence he said, “This person here claims that you and your adherents have no [valid] argument.” I said, “Let him ask whatever comes to his mind.” Abū al-‘Atāhiya moved his hand and asked, “Who moved this?” I said, “The one who fucked his own mother!” Abū al-‘Atāhiya objected, “Commander of the Faithful, he has insulted me.” I said to him, “You have negated your original doctrine, you sucker of your mother’s clitoris!” Al-Ma’mūn laughed. I added, “Ignorant man, you move your hand then ask, ‘Who has moved it?’ If it is God who has moved it, then I have not insulted you; and if you have moved it yourself, my insult stands.” Al-Ma’mūn said to him, “Do you have anything to add regarding this question?”

In the ninth discipline of his [theological] work on the unity of God, al-Kindi said, “Know that all the world is governed by fate and divine decree – I mean by fate. Nothing has been determined about any [created] effect that is better and wiser, and more perfect for the structure of the whole [than the actual world is]. For God, may His praise be sublime, created man as a compelled entity and as a free-will chooser with full power. The free-will chooser does not have perfect wisdom because perfect wisdom belongs only to the Creator of all; therefore if he is left free to choose, he will choose much that will bring disruption to the whole. So God, may His praise be sublime, determined the structure of the whole with a perfect determination, and caused some parts of it to be opportunities for the other parts, so that man can choose, by his free will and not by compulsion, from that which is better and wiser for the structure of the whole; the determination of these opportunities is predestination. Thus, it is by fate and divine decree that God, may His praise be sublime, governs all that He has created. This is the perfect governance into which no error or deficiency can enter. Hence, it is clear that every effect [such as man] has no way out of what his Lord has determined for him, some of that being by compulsion and some by choice; and [it is clear]

that every chooser has chosen from the opportunities of his predestined fate, and that he has done so by his free will and not by compulsion.”

A bedouin Arab was asked about predestination and he said, “This is a science in which controversial opinions abounded and many people differed. We should adjudge its problematic conclusions by what we already know.”

A Magian was in the company of a Qadarite on a trip. The latter asked the former, “Why don’t you become a Muslim?” The Magian said, “I will, if God permits that.” The Qadarite said, “God has permitted it, but the Devil does not let you.” The Magian said, “I am then on the side of the stronger one of the two.”

A man said to Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam, “Do you claim that God in His kindness, generosity, and justice has charged us with doing what we are unable to do, and then punishes us because of that?” Hishām said, “Yes, by God, He has indeed done so, but we are unable to say anything [about it].”

‘Amr ibn ‘Ubayd and Ibn Miskīn

‘Amr ibn ‘Ubayd and al-Ḥārith ibn Miskīn met at Minā [during the pilgrimage]. ‘Amr said, “Someone like you and me shouldn’t meet in this place then part without [obtaining] a benefit. If you like, say something; or if you like, I will.” Al-Ḥārith said, “You say.” ‘Amr asked, “Do you know anyone who is more likely to accept an excuse than Almighty and Exalted God?” “No,” replied al-Ḥārith. “And do you know of an excuse clearer than that of someone who says, ‘I cannot’, and you know that he cannot?” “No,” replied al-Ḥārith. ‘Amr then asked, “Why then does the One, who is more likely to accept an excuse than anyone else, not accept the excuse of the one whose excuse is clearer than anyone else’s?” Al-Ḥārith ibn Miskīn was perplexed and did not answer.

Al-Maʾmūn’s response to atheists and people of heterodox doctrines

Al-Maʾmūn said to the Dualist who had spoken in his presence, “I would like to ask you about a couple of matters, and no more: Does an offender ever regret his offense?” “Yes indeed,” the Dualist answered. Al-Maʾmūn asked, “Regretting one’s offense, is it an offense or a good deed?” “Rather a good deed,” the Dualist replied. Al-Maʾmūn inquired, “The person who regrets, is he the one who has offended or is it someone else?” “He is rather the one who has offended,” affirmed the Dualist. Al-Maʾmūn said, “I think, therefore, that the doer of good is the doer of evil.” The Dualist said, “I think that the one who regrets is not the one who has offended.” Al-Maʾmūn asked, “Does he then regret something he has done or something that somebody else has done?” The Dualist kept silent.

Al-Maʾmūn said to him also, “Tell me about your belief in two: can one of them create something without the help of the other?” The Dualist said, “Yes.”

Al-Maʿmūn retorted, “What is the use of two, then? One who creates everything is better for you and sounder.”

Al-Maʿmūn said to the Khurasanian apostate who had become Muslim at his hands and whom he had brought with him to Iraq, where he had later renounced Islam, “Tell me, what was it that made you uneasy about what you had liked about our religion? For, by God, I would like to keep you alive rightfully more than I would like to kill you rightfully. You became a Muslim after you had been an unbeliever, then you reverted to being an unbeliever after you had become a Muslim. If you found with us the medication for your illness, you should have treated yourself with it; and if recovery from your illness escaped you and the medication was unhelpful to you, you should have a good excuse and should not fail to justify yourself. So if we were to kill you, we would kill you in accordance with the law; and you will have meanwhile gone back to yourself seeking reflection and certainty, and thus you will not have wasted your adoption [of Islam] with determination.” The apostate said, “What made me uneasy about you [Muslims] is the variation that I have seen in your religion.” Al-Maʿmūn said, “We have two variations. **One** of them is our variation in the call to prayer, in the glorification of God in funerals, in the ritual prayers of the two [annual] feasts, in saying the testimony, in the peace greeting at [the end of] prayer, in different readings [of the Qurʾān], in different viewpoints of formal legal opinion, and in similar things; and this is not a [real] variation but rather a choice, a license, a lightening of the tradition – so that someone who calls to prayer twice or someone who performs [the ritual prayer] twice does not commit a sin, nor does someone who does that four times. **The other** variation is in such things as our variation in interpreting a verse in God’s Book, and our variation in interpreting a *ḥadīth* from our Prophet, while we are united at the same time with regard to the source of Revelation, and we are agreed on the substance of the *ḥadīth*. If this has indeed made you uneasy, then [you should also insist that] the interpretation of the text of the Torah and the Gospel be completely agreed upon, and so must be its revelation; and there must therefore be no variation between Jews and Christians in any interpretation. If God had wanted to reveal His Books together with their exegesis, and to make the speech of His Prophets and Messengers not liable to various interpretations, He would have done so. But we see that none of the matters of religion and the world have reached us in a state of full sufficiency except after long research, study, and thought. If this had been otherwise, tribulations and ordeals would have been obviated, and contention for excellence and distinction would have disappeared; a resolute person would not have been distinguished from a feeble one, nor an ignorant individual from a learned one. But this is not how the world has been constructed.” The apostate declared, “I witness that there is no god but God alone with no partner, that Christ is the servant of God, that Muḥammad is truthful, and that you are indeed the Commander of the Faithful.”

Al-Ma'mūn and 'Alī ibn Mūsā

Al-Ma'mūn said to 'Alī ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā, "By what right do you claim this matter [that is, the authority to lead Muslims]?" 'Alī said, "By the relationship of 'Alī [ibn Abī Ṭālib] to God's Messenger, may God bless him and his family and grant them peace, and by the relationship of Fāṭima to him." Al-Ma'mūn said, "If there is nothing here but blood relationship, God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, left behind him members of his family who were closer to him than 'Alī or anyone of a similar relationship; and if your claim is by Fāṭima's relationship to God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, after Fāṭima [the Prophet's daughter] the right belongs to [her sons] al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn; and 'Alī [her husband] had no right in this matter while they were alive. If this is so, 'Alī had deprived them of their right while they were sound and living, and he had taken possession of what was not rightly his." 'Alī ibn Mūsā did not utter any word in response.

From Wāṣil to Ibn 'Ubayd

Wāṣil ibn 'Aṭā' al-Ghazzāl wrote the following to 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd:

After [the exordium], depriving a human being of a blessing is in God's hands, and expediting punishment is in God's hands [too]. At any rate, this is done by [God] seeking the conclusion of sins and after paying close attention to the argument that renders a man's heart inaccessible to him. You already know what used to be addressed to you to discredit you and what used to be ascribed to you, because your doctrine was considered ugly, when we were in the company of al-Ḥasan ibn Abī al-Ḥasan, may God have mercy on his soul – we and all those of our adherents whom you knew and the coterie of friends who learned from al-Ḥasan and remembered his teachings. What a wonderful coterie of learners and memorizers that was! How mild-tempered they were, and how serious their gatherings! How clear their asceticism was, and how truthful their speech! By God, they emulated those who had passed away, and they took guidance from them. I remember al-Ḥasan, by God, and you remember him, as he sat not long ago in the eastern wings of the mosque of God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace. I remember his last conversation with us, when he mentioned death and the dread of the Lookout [where we will stand on Judgment Day]; he was sorry for himself and confessed his sins, then turned right and left, by God, and wept as a warned man who had learned his lesson. It is as if I see him now wiping the beads of sweat from his forehead and saying, "O God, I have tied the saddle on my mount and made ready to depart to my grave and bed of dust. Don't censure me by what people ascribe to me after my death. O God, I have taught what had reached me from the teachings of Your Messenger, and I explained from your perfect Book what was confirmed by the Ḥadīth of Your Prophet. But lo, I am afraid of 'Amr! Lo, I am afraid of 'Amr! I openly complain to You, his Lord. [O 'Amr,] you were on the right of Abū

Ḥudhayfa, and the closest of us to him. Your exegesis of the Revelation and your words of interpretation, with which you heavily burdened yourself and adorned your neck, have reached me. I have looked in your books and in the diminishing of ideas and the scattering of structures that your account has brought to us. The complaint of al-Ḥasan [ibn Abī al-Ḥasan] about you surely indicates what you have clearly innovated and it denotes the immensity of what you have committed. Don't be deceived, my brother, by the measures of those around you and by their respect for your power and influence, nor indeed by their lowering their eyes in respect for you. By God, tomorrow the conceit and the boasting will go, and every soul will be requited for its effort. My letter to you and my clamor [within it] are only to remind you of the conversation of al-Ḥasan, may God have mercy on his soul, which was his last conversation with us. Therefore give due attention [to the learning] you have heard, speak as you should, abandon interpreting the *ḥadīths* incorrectly, and fear God. As if already ...”*

What was said decrying stupidity and ignorance

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “An ignorant man wrongs those he mingles with, is aggressive to those who are lower than he is, is insolent with those above him, and speaks without discernment. If he sees a noble deed, he ignores it; and if a temptation comes to his mind, he succumbs to it and rushes headlong into it.”

Abū al-Dardāʾ said, “The signs of an ignorant man are three: conceit, volubility, and the prohibition of something which he himself commits.”

Ardashir said, “A sufficient indication for you of an ignorant man's defectiveness is that all people have an aversion to him and are angered when someone says they have a relationship to him.”

It used to be said, “Don't be deceived by an ignorant man's blood relationship, friendship, or familiarity. The people most deserving of being burnt by fire are those closest to it.”

It was said, “Two traits should warn you not to be close to a stupid man: his frequent turning around and his hasty answers.”

And it was said, “Don't take an ignorant man as a companion; for when he intends to benefit you, he harms you.”

A poet said:

Every disease has a medication by which treatment is sought
Except stupidity; it defies the efforts of him who treats it.

Abū al-ʿAtāhiya said:

* The letter ends abruptly here. In Mufid Muḥammad Qumayḥa's edition and in Saʿīd al-ʿAryān's, it is followed by three sections that are absent from the edition of Aḥmad Amīn *et al.* (Translator)

Beware of a stupid man's company,
 For a stupid man is like a worn out garment.
 Whenever you patch it on one side,
 The wind shakes it and it becomes quickly rent.
 Or it is like a big crack in a glass sheet,
 Have you ever seen a crack in glass cleave together?
 If you reprove him so that he may desist from error,
 He increases his evil and continues his stupidity.

Kinds of friends

Al-ʿAttābī said, “Friends are of three kinds: a branch cut off from its root, a root connected to its branch, and a branch with no root. As for the branch which is cut off from its root, it is a friendship that was based on love which has later been broken but is preserved as a claim to companionship. As for the root which is connected to its branch, it is a friendship whose root was generosity and whose branches are piety. As for the branch which has no root, it is a person whose outside is pretentious and whose inside is nonexistent.”

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “A friend is a patch in your shirt; so be careful what you patch your shirt with.”

It was said, “Among the signs of a [good] friend is that he is a friend to his friend's friend, and an enemy to his friend's enemy.”

Diḥya al-Kalbī came to ʿAlī, may God be pleased with him, and continued to mention and praise Muʿāwīya in his gathering. ʿAlī, peace be on him, said:

My enemy's friend is within my field of enmity,
 And I am affectionate to the one who loves my friend.
 Don't ever come close to me while you are my enemy's friend,
 The distance between our hearts is too great.

On the same theme, al-ʿAttābī said:

You love my enemy and claim that I am
 Your friend – my mind is distant from you.
 My friend is not someone who loves me when he sees me,
 My friend is rather someone who loves me when he is absent [from me].

Another poet said:

A friend is not one who, if his friend makes a mistake
 One day, thinks his offense is unforgivable;
 And who, if his friend disregards a right of his
 And he reproves him for that, offers embellished excuses.
 My friend is indeed someone who forgives me
 For what I committed when it was inexcusable.

And another poet said:

Many a brother of yours is one not begotten by your father,
 And many a brother, whose father is yours, may shun you.
 Be sincere toward decent men if you want their friendship,
 And know that the one who cherishes loyalty is your friend.
 So long as you are wealthy, people will befriend you;
 But if you are poor and need them, they will reject you.

A poet said:

Your friend is he who, if you rise intending to hit him
 With the sword, will not doubt your affection,
 And if you come seeking to cut off his hand
 Will advance, lest you feel you are repelled.
 He believes he is remiss in his affection for you,
 Although [in truth] he made an extra effort to increase it.

Another poet said:

If you are to choose a friend,
 Pick well and be critical.
 If he is not fair to you
 In love, seek a substitute.
 Hardly will you ever find a vile man
 Who is not an insolent man to you.

Al-ʿAṭawī said:

Spare your affection and give it only to honorable people
 And to those whose friendship brings you honor.
 Don't be deceived by the affectation and the embellishment
 Of those who show a need for you.
 How many a friend there is, who exhibits love for you,
 Yet the core of his love is putrid and stinking.
 If you reproach him for his "friendship,"
 You will disavow what you already know of him.

Al-ʿAbbās ibn Jarīr wrote to al-Ḥasan ibn Mukhlad:

Abū Muḥammad, abide by the friendship
 Of the one who is sincere, and protect it.
 If you see a rival for you in receiving
 A noble deed [from your friend], vie with him.
 A friend is indeed the one who
 Protects you when you are absent from him.
 If you examine his friendship,
 You'll laud what you'll uncover of it.
 He is like a sword which will not betray
 An angry man when he unsheathes it.

He strives obligingly for what you strive for,
Even if you have not asked for his help.

Another poet said:

Your best friend is the one who shares your bitter times,
But where is such a sharing partner [to be found these days]?
He is the one who, if you are present, will be your confidant;
And if you are absent, will be your eyes and ears.

Another poet said:

It is a misfortune for us to have a friend, whose crime
Is his encumbrance to us, his spoils being for others.

Another poet said:

If I see a deviation in a faithful friend,
I am at my wit's end what to do.
If I turn away my face from him to requite him,
My looks are angry, but my heart is not.

Someone wrote to Muḥammad ibn Bashshār:

A person who does not want you, don't want him;
And be like one who does not seek benefit from him.
Be distant from your friend, if he is distant;
But if he comes close to you by one span, be closer to him than that.
O Ibn Bashshār, how many a brother you have,
To whom your mother has not given birth!
And how many an opportunist has come your way,
Whose defect has grieved you, but you don't miss him!

Muḥammad ibn Bashshār answered him:

The young man has erred when he said,
"A person who does not want you, don't want him."
Whoever vies with friends [for friendship]
Does not reprove them and does not repeat his reproof.
Reprove your friend if he errs,
Show him affection and regain him.
And if a slanderer tells you about a shortcoming of his,
Tell him that you don't rely on him.

Some factors that bring about friendship, affection, and kind words

‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God honor him, said, "He whose words are kind must be loved."

The following verse was recited:

“How are you this morning?” and “How are you this evening?”
Are some of what makes affection grow in a noble man’s heart.

A friend should meet his friend only with [an attitude] that he likes; he should not annoy the person sitting with him by saying or doing anything to him he has nothing to do with; he should not do anything, the like of which he decries; and he should not find fault with anything, the like of which he does.

Al-Mutawakkil al-Laythī said:

Don’t forbid a moral act and commit a similar one;
It is a great shame on you, if you do.

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, said, “Three things make love for you firm in your friend’s heart: being the first to greet him, making a place for him in a gathering, and calling him by the name he likes most.”

He also said, “Nothing has a deeper effect [on you] than a friend, for better or worse.”

A poet said:

If you would like to know a man or his roots
And have a witness to inform you about the one who is absent,
Learn about a plot of land from similar ones [you know],
And learn about a friend from his friend.

‘Adī ibn Zayd said:

Don’t ask about a man but observe his friend,
For every friend emulates his friend.

‘Amr ibn Jamīl al-Taghlibī said:

I will tolerate all harm from my friend, if he is
Cross with me, except humiliation and scorn;
For a free man will haughtily reject being spurned
When he is by himself and when he is in a group.

Muṭīʿ and a seeker of his affection

A man said to Muṭīʿ ibn Iyās, “I have come to seek your affection,” [meaning: I seek being related to you]. “I agree to marry her to you,” the man answered, “on condition that her dower shall be that you not listen to people’s gossip about me.”

A proverb says, “Whoever is not tolerant and patient will not have many friends.”

And how beautiful is what Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Abbās said:

My friend, to whom I have freely given love
 And whom I have put deep in my heart,
 If you cause me an annoyance despite my affection
 And despite the annoyances I endure from others,
 I will continue to love you although I am in no need of you,
 And that's because I am bound by the bonds of loyalty.

Ibn Abī Ḥazm said:

Be satisfied of a man's affection
 With what his appearance conveys to you.
 Whoever uncovers people will find no one
 Whose secret feelings toward him are sound.
 You can hardly keep good relations with a friend
 With whom you disagree over all his transgressions.
 If my friend offends me, I will tolerate him;
 And if he pleases me, I will be his thankful brother.
 I will forgive his offense, and if he seeks
 My excuse for it, I will excuse him.

Another poet said:

If I am too slow and have kept you waiting, it is because
 I continue to be ever delayed by the vicissitudes of time.
 My heart has become sympathetic to you, for
 Someone like me is sympathetic to loyal people.
 I am pleased with what pleases you, and I am
 Worthy of keeping a friend's secrets.
 I am an enemy to him who is your enemy, peaceful to him
 With whom you have peace, a friend to him who loves you.

Abū 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Urfa said:

Men are concerned with many things
 But my concern in this world is having a helpful friend
 Who will be to me like a soul in a second separate body:
 Our bodies will be two, but the soul will be one.

A wise man said, "Friendship is a delicate gem which, if not protected and guarded, will be exposed to harm. So treat a friend by not transgressing his bounds until you become close to him, by patience until he apologizes to you if he offended you, and by contentment [with all his actions] lest you think all the virtue is yours and your friend is remiss."

Maḥmūd al-Warrāq said:

There is no good deed better than helping others.
 Thank your friend, therefore, for his help.
 If he errs, forgive his error

So that he returns a friend, as is his wont.
 Pardoning a friend's lapse, although it may weary you,
 Is better than opposing him.

ʿAbd al-Ṣamad ibn al-Muʿadhdhal said:

He who does not want you and whom you don't want
 Is of no benefit to you, nor are you of benefit to him.
 Make your friend close to you whenever he becomes distant,
 Increase the rapprochement with him and let him seek it.
 If the bases [of friendship] become weak between you
 And a trusted friend, strengthen and confirm them.

A chapter on reports about Kharijites

Kharijites and ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib

When the Kharijites rebelled against ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, after having been his followers, and when the affair of the two arbiters occurred and ʿAmr [ibn al-Āṣ] deceived Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī, they said, "There should be no arbitration but God's." When ʿAlī, may God be pleased with him, heard their slogan, he said, "This is an expression that sounds truthful but whose intention is [to perpetuate] falsehood. Their belief is that there should be no commander, but there must be a commander whether he is righteous or vicious." They said to ʿAlī, "You have cast doubt upon your own leadership and permitted your enemy to arbitrate about your self." And they went to Ḥarūrāʾ and he, may God be pleased with him, went out to them. Leaning on his bow, he delivered a speech to them and said:

This is a situation in which whoever is victorious will be victorious on Resurrection Day. I beseech you by God: "Have you known anyone more opposed to arbitration than me?" They said, "No, by God." He asked, "Do you know that you have kept forcing it on me until I accepted it?" They said, "Yes, by God." He asked, "Why then have you opposed me and seceded from me?" They said, "We have committed a great sin and have now turned to God and repented of it; so do turn to God and repent of it. Ask for God's forgiveness, and we will return to you." ʿAlī said, "I seek God's forgiveness of every sin." So they returned to him and were six thousand. When they stopped at Kufa, they spread the news that ʿAlī had renounced arbitration, repented of it, and considered it to be a falsehood. Al-Ashʿath ibn Qays came to ʿAlī, may God be pleased with him, and said, "Commander of the Faithful, people are now saying that you have considered arbitration to be a falsehood, that maintaining it is an infidelity, and that you have repented of it." So ʿAlī delivered a speech to the people and said, "Whoever claims that I have renounced arbitration has lied, and whoever considers it to be a falsehood is himself in greater falsehood." So the Kharijites

left the mosque and maintained [the result of] arbitration. ‘Alī was told, “They are rebelling against you.” He said, “I shall not fight them until they fight me – and they will.”

‘Alī sent to them ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-‘Abbās and they welcomed him and honored him when he arrived. He noticed that their foreheads had calloused spots because of continual prostration, that their hands were hardened like camels’ knees, and that they were wearing shirts that had been washed and tucked up. “What brought you here, O Ibn ‘Abbās?” they asked. “I have come to you,” he said, “from the son-in-law of God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, and his cousin who is the most learned among us about his Lord and about the tradition of His Prophet; I have also come to you from the Emigrants and the Supporters.” “We have committed a great sin,” they admitted, “when we let men be arbiters in matters of God’s religion. But if he repents as we did, and if he rises to fight our enemy, we will return [to him].” “I beseech you by God,” Ibn ‘Abbās pleaded, “to be true to yourselves. Haven’t you known that God commanded to let men be arbiters concerning a rabbit worth one-fourth of a dirham when it was hunted in the sacred territory [of Mecca], and concerning a quarrel of a man and his wife?” “Yes, by God,” they agreed. He said, “I beseech you by God, haven’t you known that God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, abstained from fighting because of the truce between him and the people of Ḥudaybiyya?” “Yes,” they said, “but ‘Alī removed himself from being the caliph of the Muslim.” “That does not take the office away from him,” Ibn ‘Abbās argued, “God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, had removed his name from the ranks of the prophets, when Suhayl ibn ‘Amr told him, ‘If I had recognized you as God’s Messenger, I would not have fought you.’ So the Prophet said to the writer [drawing up the truce terms], ‘Write: Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh.’ ‘Alī had received a promise from the two arbiters that they would not be unfair, and that if they were unfair, ‘Alī was more worthy than Mu‘āwiya and others.” They said, “Mu‘āwiya claims what ‘Alī claims.” He responded, “You must therefore appoint the one you consider the worthier of the two.” “You are right,” they agreed. Ibn ‘Abbās concluded, “Since both arbiters have been unfair, their decision should therefore not be obeyed or accepted.” Consequently, two thousand of them followed him, and four thousand remained [against ‘Alī].

Ibn al-Kawwāḥ led them in their prayers and said, “When the war occurs, your leader should be Shabath ibn Rib‘ī al-Riyāḥī.” They continued thus until they agreed on giving their allegiance to ‘Abd Allāh ibn Wahb al-Rāsibī, who led them out to al-Nahrawān. ‘Alī attacked them and killed two thousand and eight hundred of them. They were [originally] six thousand in number. In Kufa there were about two thousand who had kept their affiliation secret. A man of them came out after ‘Alī, may God be pleased with him, and said to them, “Go back and hand over to us the killer of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Khabbāb.” They said, “We have all killed him and participated in shedding his blood.”

That is because when they went out to al-Nahrawān, they met a Muslim and a Christian; so they killed the Muslim and advised that the Christian be well treated, saying, “Keep your Prophet’s covenant of protection.” They met ‘Abd Allāh ibn Khabbāb with a copy of the Qur’ān hanging from his neck, accompanied by his wife, who was pregnant. They said, “This [book] hanging from your neck commands us to kill you.” He said, “Let live what the Qur’ān lets live, and let die what the Qur’ān lets die.” “Relate to us a *ḥadīth* on the authority of your father,” they ordered. He said, “My father related to me, saying, ‘I heard God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, say, “There will be a sedition in which a man’s heart will die like his body; in the evening he is a believer and in the morning, an unbeliever. Be then God’s servant who will be killed, and don’t be God’s servant who kills.”’” They asked him, “What do you think of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar?” He commended both highly. “And what do you think of arbitration?” they asked. He said, “I believe that ‘Alī knows God better than you, that he protects His religion more than you, and that he is of greater insight than you.” They said, “You are not a follower of the right guidance but rather of men according to their names.” Then they took him to the seashore and slaughtered him. His blood gushed – running straight forth – and they bargained with a Christian man about a [bunch of] palm [dates], and he said, “It is yours as a gift.” “No,” they said, “we will take it only in exchange for payment.” “How strange this is!” the man exclaimed, “You kill a man like ‘Abd Allāh ibn Khabbāb and yet you won’t accept from us the fruit of a palm without paying for it.”

Their sects

The Kharijites then separated into four kinds: the Ibādites, the followers of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ibād; the Ṣufrites about whose name people differed, some saying they were so called after Ibn al-Ṣaffār, and others that worship exhausted them so much that their faces turned pale [*isfarrat*]; then there are the Bayhasites, the followers of Ibn Bayhas; and the Azraqites, the followers of Nāfi‘ ibn al-Azraq al-Ḥanafī. Earlier on, they were of one doctrine, differing only about a few exceptional matters.

The Kharijites and Ibn al-Zubayr

They heard that Muslim ibn ‘Uqba had gone out to Medina and that he had killed the people of Ḥarra and was coming to Mecca. They said, “We must defend God’s Sanctuary against them and test [‘Abd Allāh] ibn al-Zubayr so that, if he is of our opinion, we will follow him.” When they went to Ibn al-Zubayr, they introduced themselves to him and told him why they had come to him. He pretended that he was of their opinion, until Muslim ibn ‘Uqba arrived with the Syrians. They resisted him, [stonewalling] until they could find out the opinion of Yazīd ibn Mu‘āwiya, and they did not follow Ibn al-Zubayr.

Then they debated among themselves and said, “Let us go to this man [Ibn al-Zubayr] and see what he has to say. If he defends Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, and declares himself innocent of ‘Uthmān and ‘Alī, and proclaims that his own father and Ṭalḥa are unbelievers, we will pledge allegiance to him; otherwise, it will be clear to us where he stands and we will do what is best for ourselves.” They entered the presence of Ibn al-Zubayr while he was unready and his supporters were away from him, and they said, “We have come to you so that you may tell us your opinion. If you are right, we will pledge allegiance to you; if you are not, we will invite you to the truth. What do you think of the two old men [Abū Bakr and ‘Umar]?” He said, “I think well of them.” They asked, “And what do you think of ‘Uthmān, who protected lands for his use [unlawfully], who gave shelter to the outcast [al-Ḥakam ibn al-Āṣ, exiled by the Prophet to al-Ṭāʾif], who pretended [to forgive] the Egyptians and wrote otherwise [to Egypt’s governor], who permitted the kinsfolk of Banū Muʿīṭ to oppress people and gave them the booty due to Muslims? And what do you think of the one who succeeded him [that is, ‘Alī], who let men be arbiters of God’s religion and persisted in not repenting and not regretting? And what do you think of your own father [al-Zubayr] and his friend [Ṭalḥa] who pledged allegiance to ‘Alī when he was a just and accepted ruler without unbelief then they broke their allegiance, and made ‘Āʾisha [the Prophet’s wife] go out to fight when God had commanded that she and other women ought to stay in their homes – all of which is a reason for you to repent? If you agree with all that we have said to you, you will have favor with God as well as support from us, if God wills, and we ask God to give you success. But if you decline, God will forsake you and will be victorious over you at our hands.”

Ibn al-Zubayr said, “God, to whom be glory and power, has commanded that the worst unbelievers and the haughtiest evil-doers be addressed in kinder words than yours. He said to Moses and his brother, may God bless them both, ‘Go to Pharaoh, for he has transgressed all bounds. But speak gently to him, perhaps he may possibly heed or fear.’ [Q. 20:44] God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, ‘Don’t harm the living by reviling the dead.’ He prohibited the reviling of Abū Jahl for the sake of ‘Ikrima, his son, knowing that Abū Jahl was the enemy of God and of His Messenger, and the one who persisted in being a polytheist and, before the Hijra and after it, he was the one who resolutely fought God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace – polytheism alone having been a sufficient sin for him. Furthermore, you could have dispensed with words mentioning Ṭalḥa and my father and you could have said instead, ‘Do you declare yourself innocent of the unjust?’ If they were both unjust, they would be included among them; and if not, you would not have angered me by reviling my father and his friend, and you know that God Almighty said to the believer regarding his parents, ‘And if they strive with you to make you associate with Me what you have no knowledge of, then don’t obey them but be a kind companion to them in the world.’ [Q. 31:15]

He also said, ‘And speak kindly to men.’ [Q. 2:83] What you have called for is a matter that has consequences, yet nothing persuades you but explanation and frankness. By my life, that is more likely to debunk your arguments, it is clearer in showing the path of truth, and it is worthier in making everyone know his friend and his foe. Come to me this evening, and I will reveal to you what my position is, if God Most High wills.”

Ibn al-Zubayr’s speech to them

In the evening they came to him and he went out to meet them, having put on his weapons. When Najda saw that, he said, “This is the coming out of a man who is ready to oppose and fight you.” Ibn al-Zubayr sat on a knoll, thanked God and praised Him, and blessed His Prophet. Then he commended Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, mentioned the early years of ‘Uthmān’s caliphate, then related them to the years in which they disapproved of his way of life, and he considered them as good as the past ones. He informed them that ‘Uthmān had given shelter to al-Ḥakam ibn al-Āṣi by permission of God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace. He mentioned the practice of designating land as a protected sanctuary and what use had been made of it, and that the people had blamed ‘Uthmān for things he would not have done in the first place if he was right, and that he had later forgiven them out of his kindness. He mentioned the Egyptians who had brought ‘Uthmān a letter which they said was written by him, after he had guaranteed they would be safe for blaming him but had later written a letter [to Egypt’s governor] to kill them. Ibn al-Zubayr said that when they showed him the letter, ‘Uthmān swore by God that he had not written it and had not ordered it to be written; Ibn al-Zubayr said that God Almighty commanded that an oath should be accepted, that it was accepted from those who did not have the precedence of ‘Uthmān [in adopting Islam] in addition to his being the in-law of God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, and in addition to his eminent position as caliph. Ibn al-Zubayr mentioned that the pledge of allegiance [to the Prophet] under the tree, the Allegiance of Consent, was made because of ‘Uthmān. He added that ‘Uthmān was a man who, if he had to swear, would swear in truth, and that he would redeem his oath by one hundred thousand [camels] and would not swear [such an oath otherwise]. God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “Whosoever swears by God should be believed, and his oath should be accepted.” Ibn al-Zubayr affirmed that ‘Uthmān was the Commander of the Faithful, like his two preceding friends [Abū Bakr and ‘Umar], and he said, “I am his friend’s friend, and his enemy’s enemy; and my father and his friend [Ṭalḥa] are the friends of God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace. God’s Messenger said on Almighty God’s authority that when Ṭalḥa’s finger was cut off at the Battle of Uhud [while defending the Prophet], it preceded him to Paradise, and he said that Ṭalḥa deserved [Paradise]. Whenever [Abū Bakr] al-Ṣiddiq

mentioned the Battle of Uḥud, he used to say that all that day or most of it was Ṭalḥa's, and that al-Zubayr was the disciple of God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, and his chosen one and was one mentioned in Paradise. God Almighty said, 'God was pleased with the believers when they pledged allegiance to you under the tree.' [Q. 48:18] And He did not later inform us that He was angry with them. So if what they had done was right, they deserved God's pleasure; and if it was wrong, God's pardon would encompass it. As for God's giving them success in achieving precedence [in adopting Islam] and being with their Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, and whatever else you mentioned about them, you should have begun by talking about your mother 'Ā'isha; if any one refuses [to acknowledge] that she be a mother to him, he will have cast off the attribute of belief from himself, for God, may His name be honored, said, 'The Prophet is nearer to the believers than their own selves, and his wives are mothers to them.'" [Q.33:6] They looked at one another, then left him and went away.

Ibn al-Azraq's letter to Ibn al-Zubayr

Nāfi' ibn al-Azraq later wrote the following to 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr, inviting him to his cause:

After this exordium, I put you on your guard against God's punishment on the day when every soul will find the good it has done brought forth, and it wishes the evil it has committed will be separated from it by a long distance, and God puts you on guard against His punishment. So fear God, your Lord, and don't take the transgressors as friends, for God says, "And whoso of you takes them as friends will be one of them." [Q.5:51] And He said, "Let not the believers take the unbelievers as friends rather than the believers; for whoso does that does not belong to God in anything." [Q. 3:28]. I was present on the day 'Uthmān was killed. By my life, if he was killed unfairly, those who killed him and those who abandoned him were unbelievers; but if those who killed him were well-guided – and they are well-guided – then those who took him as their friend and supported him were unbelievers. I know that your father [al-Zubayr], Ṭalḥa, and 'Alī were the severest people with him, and yet they were wavering between killing him and abandoning him regarding this matter. Now you support your father, Ṭalḥa, and 'Uthmān: how can one within one religion be a supporter of both an intentional killer and the one killed? 'Alī assumed the caliphate after him, dispelled suspicions, established punishments, and let legal prescriptions run their course; he gave matters their due, both for him and against him. Your father and Ṭalḥa pledged allegiance to him, then unfairly revoked their allegiance. The opinion about you and them is as Ibn 'Abbās, God have mercy on him, said, "If 'Alī was a believer when you disobeyed him and fought him, then you were unbelievers by fighting the believers and the just leaders; but if 'Alī was an unbeliever, as you claimed, and was unjust in governance, then you have earned God's wrath by fleeing from marching [against him]." You have been an enemy

of his and a critic of his comportment; how then can you support him after his death?

Najda and Ibn al-Azraq

Najda, who was one of the [Kharijite] Šufrites known as Qa‘adiyya [who remained resident among Muslims], wrote the following to Nāfi‘ ibn al-Azraq when he heard about his indiscriminate interference with people, his killing of babies, and his legitimization of taking possession of property left in trusts:

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. After this exordium, I have known you for long to be like a merciful father to the orphans and like a kind brother to the weak, heedless for God’s sake of those who blame you, and never helpful to an oppressor. This is how you and your friends have been. Don’t you remember your own words, “If I had not known that the reward of a just ruler was equivalent to that of all his subjects, I would not have assumed rule over even two Muslims.” But when you gave yourself up to obeying your Lord to seek His satisfaction, and when you reached the heart of the truth and experienced its naked reality, Satan devoted himself exclusively to you, but there was no one of heavier pressure on him than you and your followers. However, he sought to win you over and he enticed you, so you were led astray and you considered as unbelievers those Muslims whom God had excused in His Book for their weakness and inability to go out and fight. God, may He be praised, said – and His speech is the truth and His promise is truthful –, “There is no blame on the weak and the sick and those who find nothing to spend, if they are sincere to God and His Messenger.” [Q. 9:91] Then He named them by the best names, “There is no way to reproach **good-doers**.” [Q. 9:91] So, you considered it permissible to kill babies, although God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, had prohibited killing them. God, may He be praised, said, “No burdened soul can bear the burden of another.” [Q. 35:18] God also spoke well of those unable to go out and fight but He preferred to them those who do. The status of the people who do well most does not displace the status of those who do less, except if they share an original act. Have you not heard His saying, may He blessed and exalted, “Those of the believers who sit [at home] – unless they are disabled – and those who strive in the cause of God are not equal.” [Q. 4:95] God considered them believers but He preferred to them those who strive with their deeds. And you are of the opinion that you ought not to give property deposited in trust back to those who oppose you, whereas God commands you to give the trusts to their owners. Fear God, then, and look at yourself, and fear “a day when no father will be of any avail to his son, and no son will be of any avail to his father.” [Q. 31:33] God is surely watching, His judgment is just and His speech is decisive. Peace [be to you].

Nāfi‘ ibn al-Azraq wrote back to him:

In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. After this exordium, your letter has reached me, in which you admonish me, advise me, and rebuke

me, and in which you describe the truth that I used to follow and the right conduct I used to prefer. I beseech God to make me one of those who listen to a speech and follow the best part of it. You found fault with me, condemning me for considering unbelievers those who don't fight, and for killing babies and making permissible the taking of trusts. I will explain to you why that ought to be so, if God wills. As for those who tarried, they were not like those you mentioned who lived in the period of God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace; for those were defeated and besieged in Mecca and had no way to escape or to communicate with the Muslims; however, these [other men] were learned in religion and had read the Qur'ān, and their way was clear to them. You know what God says about those who are like them. He says, "Those whom the angels have taken in death, having wronged themselves, will be asked, 'What were your circumstances?' They will say, 'We were weak on the earth.' They will be asked, 'Was not God's earth vast enough for you to emigrate in it?' [Q. 4:97]. And He said, 'Those who were left behind rejoiced in their tarrying behind God's Messenger.' [Q. 9:81] He also said, 'And those who make excuses from among the bedouin Arabs came so that they might be exempted; and those who lied to God and His Messenger tarried. A painful punishment shall befall those of them who disbelieve.' [Q. 9:90] Therefore, look at their names and their attributes."

As for the matter of babies, God's prophet Noah, peace be upon him, was more knowledgeable about God than I am and you are, Najda. He said, "My Lord, don't leave on the earth a single one of the unbelievers; for if You do, they will lead Your servants astray and will give birth to only unbelieving sinners." [Q. 71:27] He qualified them as unbelieving, when they were babies and before they were born. How was that possible for the people of Noah, yet it is not possible for our own people? God also says, "Are your unbelievers better than those or have you an exemption in the Scriptures?" [Q. 54:43] These [people] are like the polytheists of the [pre-Islamic] Arabs, a head tax is not acceptable from them, and there is no choice in our relations with them except the sword or [their adoption of] Islam.

As for legitimizing the taking of trusts from those who oppose us, God Almighty has legitimized their possession for us, as He legitimized their blood. Their blood is legally permissible [to shed] and their possessions are booty to the Muslims. Fear God, then, and think again. For you have no excuse but to repent, and you are not at liberty to abandon us and sit apart from us, leaving our way and our doctrine that we have clearly planned out for you. And peace be upon him who acknowledges the truth and acts according to it.

Mirdās and Ibn Ziyād

Mirdās Abū Bilāl was one of the Kharijites, and he was in hiding. When he saw the diligence of Ibn Ziyād in killing and imprisoning the Kharijites, he said to his followers, "By God, we cannot live among these unjust people, subject to

their unfair laws and unreasonable ways. By God, enduring this [injustice] is hard, but unsheathing swords and frightening travelers are hard too. However, we shall not be the ones to begin [a fight] with them, and we shall not unsheathe a single sword. We will fight only those who fight us.” His supporters met with him, and they were thirty men. They wanted to appoint Ḥurayth ibn Ḥajl as their leader, but he declined. So they appointed Mirdās Abū Bilāl to lead them. When he was leading them away, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Rabāḥ al-Anṣārī ran into him, and he was a friend of his. “My brother,” he said to ‘Abd Allāh. “Yes?” the latter said. “I would like to flee with my religion and my supporters’ religion,” he explained, “from the laws of the unjust and tyrannical [rulers].” ‘Abd Allāh asked, “Has anyone been aware of your presence?” “No,” said Mirdās. “Go back, then,” ‘Abd Allāh advised. “Are you afraid some evil will befall me?” Mirdās asked. “Yes,” ‘Abd Allāh answered, “I’m afraid you will be brought [to the rulers].” “Don’t be afraid,” Mirdās reassured him, “I will not unsheathe a sword, I will not frighten anyone, and I will fight only those who fight me.”

Mirdās then went forth until he reached Āsak, a locality near Khurāsān. Some funds were being carried to Ibn Ziyād and were passing by him [in a caravan]. His supporters had become forty. So he stopped the caravan and took from the funds his stipend and that of his supporters, and returned the rest to the sender. “Tell your friend,” he said, “that we have received our stipends.” One of his supporters asked, “Why do we leave the rest?” Mirdās answered, “They divide this [state] revenue and they perform the ritual prayer; so we ought not to fight them.”

This Abū Bilāl Mirdās has some poems on rebelling, one of which is the following:

After [the death of] the honorable and pious Ibn Wahb,
 Who boldly embarked on dangers in those wars,
 Will I like to stay alive or hope for safety,
 When they have also killed Zayd ibn Ḥiṣn and Mālik?
 O Lord, let my intention and my discernment be intact
 And grant me survival until I meet those [martyrs].

It was said that one of the supporters of [Ibn] Ziyād said, “We went out heading for Khurāsān with an army. Passing by Āsak, we suddenly met with Mirdās and his supporters, who were forty men. He asked, ‘Are you heading out in order to fight us?’ ‘No,’ we said, ‘we intend to go to Khurāsān.’ He said, ‘Tell those you meet that we have not gone out in order to spread evil in the world, or to frighten anyone, but rather to escape from being harmed. We only fight those who fight us, and we only take our stipends from the [state] revenue.’ Then he asked, ‘Was anyone commissioned to [fight] us?’ We said, ‘Yes. Aslam ibn Zur‘a al-Kilābī.’ He asked, ‘When do you think he will reach us?’ We said, ‘On such-and-such a day.’ Abū Bilāl then said, ‘God is sufficient for us and He is an excellent One to trust.’”

ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Ziyād commissioned Aslam ibn Zurʿa al-Kilābī and sent him out to them with two thousand men. When he reached them, Abū Bilāl shouted to him, “Beware of God, Aslam. We do not want to fight or to retain any funds for ourselves [unlawfully]. What do you want?” He said, “I want to take you back to Ibn Ziyād.” “He will then kill us,” Abū Bilāl said. “So what, if he kills you?” said Aslam. “Would you share with him the shedding of our blood?” Abū Bilāl asked. “Yes,” Aslam retorted, “he is right and you are wrong.” “How can he be right,” Abū Bilāl asked, “when he is actually a shameless adulterer who obeys the unjust?”

Then they attacked him as though they were one man, and Aslam and his friends were defeated and put to flight. When the news came to Ibn Ziyād, he was very angry with Aslam and said to him, “You with two thousand men were routed by forty!” Aslam said, “By God, I would rather be blamed by you when I am alive than be praised by you when I am dead.” Whenever Aslam used to go out to the market and pass by boys, they would shout at him, “Abū Bilāl is behind you!” So he complained to Ibn Ziyād, who then ordered the policemen to prevent people from taunting him.

The Response of ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, may God be pleased with him, to Shawdhab, the Kharijite

Al-Haytham ibn ʿAdī said:

I was informed by ʿAwāna ibn al-Ḥakam that Muḥammad ibn al-Zubayr said:

ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz sent me with ʿAwn ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd to Shawdhab, the Kharijite, and his supporters when they rebelled in al-Jazīra, and he gave us a letter to them from him. When we reached them, we gave them his letter. [After reading it,] they sent us back to ʿUmar with a man from the tribe of Banū Shaybān and a man of Abyssinian features who was named Shawdhab. They both came with us to ʿUmar, who was at Khunāṣira [near Aleppo]. We went up to him in a room, where he was with his son ʿAbd al-Malik and his chamberlain Muzāḥim. We told him where the Kharijites were and he said, “Search them lest there be anything made of metal with them, then bring them in.” When they entered, they said, “Peace be to you,” and they sat down. ʿUmar said to them, “Tell me, what made you rebel against my rule, and what is it that you resent?” The black one of the two said, “By God, we are not resentful against you for anything in your behavior, in your seeking justice, and in your good treatment of those whom you rule. But there is something by which, if you grant it to us, you will be one of us and we one with you; and by which, if you withhold it from us, you will not be one of us and we not one with you.” ʿUmar asked, “And what is it?” The black man said, “We have seen that you differed with the people of your house, and that you called [these differences] injustices; hence, you have taken a path other than theirs. If you claim that you

are right and they were wrong, curse them and declare yourself unaffiliated with them. This is what unites us with you or separates us from you.”

‘Umar spoke. He praised God and lauded Him, then said, “I know or think that you have not rebelled in this way in order to seek this world and its chattel, but rather to seek the Hereafter. However, you have taken the wrong path to it. I am going to ask you about something and, by God, be truthful in answering me as far as you can.” They said, “Yes.” He said, “Tell me about Abū Bakr and ‘Umar. Were they not two of those who came before you and two whom you have vindicated and about whom you testified that they achieved salvation?” They said, “Yes, by God.” ‘Umar continued, “When God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, passed away and the Arabs apostatized, do you know that Abū Bakr fought them, shed their blood, seized their possessions, and took their women and offspring as captives?” “Yes,” they said. He asked, “Do you know that ‘Umar came after Abū Bakr and returned those captives to their tribes?” “Yes,” they said. He asked, “Did ‘Umar declare himself unaffiliated with Abū Bakr, or do you declare yourselves unaffiliated with either of them?” “No,” they said. “Tell me about the people of al-Nahrawān,” ‘Umar continued, “Are they not among your good ancestors and among those about whom you testify that they have achieved salvation?” “Yes,” they said. He asked, “Do you know that the people of Kufa restrained themselves when they rebelled, that they did not shed blood, that they did not disturb anyone’s peace, and that they did not seize anyone’s possessions?” “Yes,” they said. He continued, “And when the people of Basra rebelled with Mis‘ar ibn Fudayk, do you know that they attacked people and killed them, and that, when they encountered ‘Abd Allāh ibn Khabbāb ibn al-Aratt, a Companion of God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, they killed him and killed his slave-girl, then killed [all] the women and children, and even threw them into the boiling pots of buttermilk stew?” “Yes, this happened,” they said. ‘Umar asked, “Did the people of Kufa declare themselves unaffiliated with the people of Basra?” “No,” they answered. “Do you yourselves declare yourselves unaffiliated with either of the two groups?” “No,” they said. ‘Umar asked, “Do you think religion is one or two?” “It is rather one,” they affirmed. He asked, “Is there anything in it that you can do and I cannot?” “No,” they said. “How then,” he asked, “can it be possible for you to vindicate Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, and for both of them to vindicate each other, and for you to vindicate the people of Kufa and Basra, and for them to vindicate one another – when they had all differed in the most important things: regarding the shedding of blood, the preservation of female honor, and the respect of property – and yet it is not possible for me but to curse the people of my house and to declare myself unaffiliated with them? Do you think that cursing sinners is an inevitable, prescribed duty? If so, when have you last cursed Pharaoh, who is the one who said, ‘I am your high Lord’?” The black man said, “I don’t remember that I have cursed him.” “Woe be to you,” ‘Umar said, “is it possible for you not to curse Pharaoh when he is the most wicked of

all creatures, and yet it is not possible for me but to curse the people of my house and declare myself unaffiliated with them? Woe to you all, you are ignorant people. You intended something but you went the wrong way about it. You reject people's deeds, which God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, accepted. God sent him to them when they were idolaters, and he invited them to overthrow their idols and to testify that there is no god but God and that Muḥammad is His servant and messenger. Whosoever says and believes this will have his blood spared, his property secured, and his dignity dutifully preserved. And with this, he is safe with God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, and he is equal to all Muslims and is accountable to God. Don't you contend with those who overthrew idols, refused other religions, and witnessed that there is no god but God and that Muḥammad is God's Messenger, and regard the shedding of their blood and the seizing of their possessions as permissible, and you curse them? Whereas those who abandoned all that and refused it, be they Jews, Christians, or people of other religions, you regard their blood and possessions sacrosanct, and consider them secure in your view?" The black man said, "I have not heard anyone of clearer argument and of closer understanding than the one I have heard today. As for me, I testify that you are right, and I declare myself unaffiliated with those who declare themselves unaffiliated with you." Turning to the black man's companion, 'Umar asked him, "O brother of Banū Shaybān, what do you say?" "How beautiful what you have said and described is!" the man said, "but I am not someone who can decide for other people; I must meet them and tell them what you said, and see what their argument is." 'Umar said, "It is up to you!" And so, the Abyssinian remained with 'Umar, who commanded that he be given a gift but he died soon afterwards; and the Shaybānī man rejoined his friends, and was killed with them after 'Umar's death.

Speaking of people of heretic tendencies

A certain man was mentioned in the presence of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace. His virtue and diligence in observing religious duties were being mentioned when he put in an appearance. They said, "Messenger of God, here he is." God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, "Truly, I do see Satan's arrogant look in his eyes!" The man approached, stopped, and greeted everyone. The Prophet asked him, "When coming to us, were you telling yourself that there is no one among the people who is better than you?" "Yes," the man replied, and went to take a place in the mosque in order to pray. The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, asked, "Who of you will rise up to him and kill him?" Abū Bakr said, "I will, O Messenger of God." And he rose up to him but found him praying, so he was awed and left him. "What have you done?" the Prophet asked. "I found him praying, O Messenger, and I was awed." The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him

peace, asked, "Who of you will rise up to him and kill him?" 'Umar said, "I will, O Messenger of God." He rose up to him and found him praying, so he was awed and left him, and said, "O Messenger of God, I found him praying and I was awed." God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, asked again, "Who of you will rise up to him and kill him?" 'Alī said, "I will, O Messenger of God." The Prophet said, "You are the one for him, if you can catch up with him." 'Alī rose up to him but found that he had left. The Prophet, peace and blessing be upon him, said, "This is the first innovation that comes to my community. If you had killed him, no two persons would differ with each other after that. The Israelites differed and were divided into seventy-two sects. This community [of mine] will differ and be divided into seventy-three sects, all of which will go to hellfire except one, namely, the consensual collectivity."

The Rejectionists

They were called *Rāfiḍa* [Rejectionists] because they rejected Abū Bakr and 'Umar, whom none of the people of heretic tendencies rejected other than they. The *Shi'a* [Shi'ites] were less [antagonistic]: they preferred 'Alī to 'Uthmān, and they vindicated Abū Bakr and 'Umar. As for the Rejectionists, they were excessively fanatical about 'Alī, some of them believing in him in the manner Christians believe in Christ; these are the Saba'iyya, the followers of 'Abd Allāh ibn Saba', may God's curse be upon them; and about them al-Sayyid al-Ḥimyarī said:

They are a group excessively fanatical about 'Alī, their father be damned,
And they burden the souls to weariness with his love.
They believe he is God, may our Creator be glorified
Above having a son or being a father.

'Alī, may God be pleased with him, burned them by fire.

Al-Mughīra ibn Sa'd and al-A'mash

One of the Rejectionists was al-Mughīra ibn Sa'd, the client of Bajīla. Al-A'mash said:

I entered into the presence of al-Mughīra ibn Sa'd and asked him about 'Alī's virtues. He said, "You can't bear them!" "I certainly can," I said. He mentioned Adam, God's blessings be upon him, and said, "'Alī is better than him!" Then he mentioned later prophets and said, "'Alī is better than them!" When he then reached Muḥammad, may God bless him and grant him peace, he said, "'Alī is like him." "You lie," I said, "God's curse be upon you." He said, "I told you, you can't bear them."

Some Rejectionists claim that 'Alī, may God be pleased with him, is in the clouds. When a cloud casts its shade over them, they say, "Peace be to you, Abū al-Ḥasan!" A poet mentioned them, and said:

I am unaffiliated with the Kharijites and am not one of them,
 I am unaffiliated with al-Ghazzāl and of Ibn Bāb,
 And with a group who, when mentioning ‘Alī,
 Return greetings to the clouds.
 But with all my heart, I love God’s Messenger
 And the righteous one [Abū Bakr]
 And I know that this is right and proper.
 Truly, through him I hope for a good future reward.

These Rejectionists are called al-Manṣūriyya, and are the followers of Abū Manṣūr al-Kisf who was nicknamed al-Kisf because he used to interpret the speech of God Almighty, “If they see darkness [*kisf*] falling down from the sky, they will say ‘Clouds piled up.’” [Q. 52:44] *Kisf* is ‘Alī and he is in the clouds.

Al-Mughīra ibn Sa’d was one of the Saba’iyya whom ‘Alī, may God be pleased with him, burned by fire. He used to say, “If ‘Alī wished, he could revive ‘Ād and Thamūd and many other later generations. He rebelled against Khālīd ibn ‘Abd Allāh, and the latter killed him and crucified him in Wāsiṭ near al-‘Āshir Bridge.

One of the Rejectionists was the poet Kuthayyir ‘Azza. When he was dying, he called a niece of his and said to her, “My niece, your uncle used to love this man, and so, love him.” He meant ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him. She said, “Your advice, my uncle, is rejected. By God, I do love him, but mine is a love different from yours.” He then said, “I am unaffiliated with you,” and recited the following verses:

I declare to God I am unaffiliated with Ibn Arwā
 And with the belief of all the Kharijites,
 I am also unaffiliated with ‘Umar and with an aged man
 Who was called Commander of the Faithful.

Ibn Arwā is ‘Uthmān.

All the Rejectionists believe in the Return but say that the Hour of Resurrection will not come until the Mahdī, who is Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī, returns and fills the world with justice as it had been filled with injustice. He will also revive their dead and they will return to the world, and all people will then become one single religious community. On this idea, a poet said:

Indeed, the Imams and just rulers
 From Quraysh are the equal four:
 ‘Alī and his three sons,
 Who are the obvious descendants.
 One is a descendant of faith and piety,
 Another is a descendant killed at Karbalā’.

By the three descendants he meant: al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn, and Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyya, the Mahdī who will appear at the end of time.

Among the Rejectionists was al-Sayyid al-Ḥimyarī. In the council of Kufa, cushions used to be spread out for him to sit on. He believed in resurrection and said the following on that theme:

When the back hair on a man's head turns grey
 And hairdressers treat it with hair dye,
 His cheerfulness is gone and he is perishing.
 Rise, then, and lament youth, I adjure you,
 For what has lapsed of it will not return
 To anyone until the Day of Resurrection,
 A Day when people return
 To their world before the Reckoning.
 I believe that this will be truly so,
 I have no doubt about resurrection,
 For God has informed us about men
 Who lived after having been buried in the soil.

He also said, lamenting his brother:

My mother's son, may my soul and wealth be your ransom.
 You were my support, my refuge, and my beauty.
 By my life, if I left you in a narrow tomb, covered by soil,
 I will soon meet you: alive and well,
 Able to hear and see, and in the best condition,
 Having been resurrected from the tomb and returning
 After your rotting bones have decomposed;
 Or like the seventy envoys with Moses
 Who saw a terrifying sight
 When, in their wickedness, they had wanted to see God—
 And how can the Transcendent Sublime One be seen—
 And He struck them down with a thunderbolt that burnt them
 Then He, the extremely resourceful Sly One, revived them.

Al-Ma'mūn and a man from the Suppositionists

A man from the Suppositionists (al-Ḥisbāniyya) entered into the presence of al-Ma'mūn, and the latter said to Thumāma ibn al-Ashras, "Speak to him." So Thumāma asked the man, "What do you believe? What is your doctrine?" The man said, "I believe that all things are in the imagination and in one's supposition. Of them, people understand only that which is commensurate with their minds. There is no Truth in reality." Thumāma went up to him and slapped his face harshly. The man protested, "Commander of the Faithful, he dares do this in your presence?" Thumāma asked him, "And what have I done?" "You have slapped me," the man said. "Perhaps I have only anointed you with ben tree oil!" Then he recited:

Perhaps Adam is our mother
 And Eve is our father in supposition.
 Perhaps the white birds
 You have seen were crows.
 Perhaps when you sat down, you
 Stood up; and when you came, you went.
 Perhaps violets are lilies,
 And sweet spice is rue.
 Perhaps you eat your shit
 And suppose it to be kebab.

Ibn ‘Abbās and a Rejectionist

Ibn Abī Shayba related that ‘Abd Allāh ibn Shaddād said:

‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās said to me, “I am going to tell you a most unusual story. A man knocked on my door after I had taken off my clothes for the noon [rest]. ‘Nothing but an important matter must have brought him at such an hour.’ I said, ‘Let him in.’ When he entered, he asked, ‘When will *that* man be resurrected?’ ‘What man?’ I asked. ‘‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib,’ he said. ‘He will not be resurrected until God resurrects all those in the tombs,’ I answered. ‘And you really believe what those ignorant people say!’ he growled. I said, ‘Take him out of my sight. May God curse him.’”

Among the Rejectionists are the Kaysāniyya and, I say, they are the followers of al-Mukhtār ibn Abī ‘Ubayd, and it is said that his name is Kaysān.

Among the Rejectionists are the Ḥusayniyya, and they are the followers of Ibrāhīm ibn al-Ashtar. They used to roam about in the alleys of Kufa at night, shouting, “To the revenge of al-Ḥusayn!” So they were called al-Ḥusayniyya.

Among the Rejectionists are the Ghurābiyya. They were so called because they said, “‘Alī resembles the Prophet more than a raven [*ghurāb*] resembles a raven.”

Among the Rejectionists are the Zaydiyya, and they are the followers of Zayd ibn ‘Alī, who was killed in Khurāsān. They are the least fanatical among the Rejectionists, but they believe they should rebel in support of everyone who rebels.

The Rejectionists and al-Sha‘bī

Mālik ibn Mu‘āwiya said:

As we were mentioning the Rejectionists, al-Sha‘bī said to me, “O Mālik, if I wished that they be slaves to me and that they fill my house with gold on condition that I tell them a single lie about ‘Alī, they would have done so; but, by God, I will never tell a lie about him. O Mālik, I have studied all the heretic tendencies and I haven’t found a group more stupid than the Rejectionists. If they could have been animals, they would have been donkeys, or if they could

have been birds, they would have been carrion-vultures.” Then he added, “I caution you against the error of [the people of] heretic tendencies, worst of whom are the Rejectionists. For they are the Jews of this [Islamic] community: they hate Islam as the Jews hate Christianity. They did not adopt Islam out of desire for God or out of fear of Him, but rather out of hatred for the Muslims and in order to wrong them. ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, burned them by fire and exiled them to [far-off] countries; among the latter were ‘Abd Allāh ibn Saba’, whom he exiled to Sābāt, and ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sabāb, whom he exiled to al-Jāzar [near Ctesiphon], and Abū al-Karawwas. The affliction of the Rejectionists is like the affliction of the Jews: the Jews believe, ‘Kingship shall only be in the House of David,’ and the Rejectionists believe, ‘Rule shall only be in the House of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib’; the Jews believe, ‘No fighting shall be permissible until the coming of the expected Messiah and the call of a herald from Heaven,’ and the Rejectionists believe, ‘No fighting for the cause of God shall be permissible until the coming of the Mahdī [the Guided One] and the lowering down of a rope from Heaven.’ The Jews delay the sunset prayer until the stars are intermeshed, and likewise the Rejectionists. The Jews don’t think the threefold divorce is worth anything, and likewise the Rejectionists. The Jews don’t believe that [divorced] women should undergo a waiting period [to ascertain pregnancy or otherwise], and likewise the Rejectionists. The Jews permit the shedding of the blood of every Muslim, and likewise the Rejectionists. The Jews have verbally corrupted the Torah, and similarly the Rejectionists have verbally corrupted the Qur’ān. The Jews hate Gabriel and say, ‘He is our enemy among the angels,’ and the Rejectionists similarly say, ‘Gabriel [*ḡibrīl*] erred by delivering the Revelation to Muḥammad and not to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.’ The Jews don’t eat the flesh of a slaughter-camel, and likewise the Rejectionists. The Jews and the Christians have a merit over the Rejectionists in two qualities – the Jews were asked, ‘Who is the best in your religious community?’ and they said, ‘The followers of Moses’; the Christians were likewise asked, and they said, ‘The followers of Jesus’ [*‘Īsā*]; and the Rejectionists were asked, ‘Who is the worst of the people of your religious community?’ and they said, ‘The followers of Muḥammad: God commanded them to seek forgiveness for them but they vilified them.’ Therefore, the sword will ever be unsheathed against them until the Day of Resurrection; they will never have a firm footing anywhere, no flag of theirs will ever rise, they will never be united, their cause will always be defeated, their forces will ever be disunited, and their gathering will ever be dispersed. Whenever they kindle a fire for war, God will extinguish it.”

Al-Sha‘bī said, “I cannot compare the Rejectionists’ interpretation of the Qur’ān with anything but the unsustainable interpretation of a man from the tribe of Makhzūm of Mecca. I saw him sitting in the courtyard of the Ka‘ba, and he said, ‘O Sha‘bī, how do you interpret this verse [of poetry]? The tribe of Tamīm err in its interpretation and claim it is one of the things said about a man of theirs – it is the verse [*bayt*] of the poet, saying:

It is a house [*bayt*] in whose courtyard Zurāra is sitting,
And so are Mujāshiʿ, Abū al-Fawāris, and Nahshal.’

‘How do you yourself interpret it?’ I asked. He said, ‘The *bayt* is this house,’ and he pointed with his hand to the Kaʿba, ‘and Zurāra is the Hījr section of it enclosing [*zarrara*] it.’ I asked him, ‘And Mujāshiʿ?’ He said, ‘It is the well of Zamzam which is greedy [*jashiʿa*] with its water.’ I asked, ‘And Abū al-Fawāris?’ He said, ‘It is Abū Qubays, Mecca’s mountain.’ I asked, ‘How about Nahshal?’ He thought for a long while, then he said, ‘I’ve got it. It is the lamp of the Kaʿba, which is long and black, for that’s what *nahshal* means.’”

Their views about the Shīʿites

Abū ʿUthmān ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ related that a man who was one of the chief merchants informed him and said, “There was an old man with us on the ship who was ill-tempered and who used to sit with his head drooped in silence for a long time. Whenever the Shīʿites were mentioned to him, he used to become irritated, his face became ashen, and his eyebrows knotted in anger. One day I said to him, ‘May God have mercy on you, what is it that you resent about the Shīʿites? I have noticed that when they are mentioned you become angry and upset.’ He said, ‘I resent nothing about them but this *sh* sound at the beginning of their name. I have never come across it except in every kind of evil [*sharr*], foreboding [*shuʿm*], satan [*shayṭān*], trouble [*shaghab*], misery [*shaqāʾ*], shame [*shanār*], sparks [*sharar*], disgrace [*shayn*], thorns [*shawk*], complaint [*shakwā*], lust [*shahwa*], vilification [*shatm*], and avarice [*shuḥḥ*].’ Abū ʿUthmān said, “After this, no Shīʿite has ever had a standing.”

A chapter on the theology of theologians

Al-Mūbadh (the religious scholar of the Persians) entered into the presence of Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam and said to him, “O Hishām, is there anything surrounding the world?” “No,” Hishām answered. “If I put out my hand,” al-Mūbadh continued, “is there anything that will stop it?” “There is nothing that will stop it,” replied Hishām, “and there is nothing to put out your hand into.” Al-Mūbadh asked, “How do I know this?” “O Mūbadh,” Hishām said, “you and I are on the edge of the world. I told you, ‘O Mūbadh, I see nothing.’ And you have asked, ‘Why don’t you see?’ So I have said, ‘There is no darkness here that prevents me [from seeing].’ You then said to me, ‘O Hishām, I see nothing.’ And I asked you, ‘Why don’t you see?’ You said, ‘There is no light by which I can see.’ Are our two religious communities [*al-millatān*] equal in contradiction?” Al-Mūbadh said, “Yes.” Hishām concluded, “If they are equal in contradiction, they are not equal in denying that there is nothing.” Al-Mūbadh gestured with his hand indicating that Hishām was right.

A man said to one of the governors of the ‘Abbāsids, “I can make Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam say that ‘Alī, may God be pleased with him, was wrong.” “If you can do that, I will give you such-and-such,” the governor said. Hishām was brought in, and the man said to him, “I beseech you by God, Abū Muḥammad. Don’t you know that ‘Alī disputed with al-‘Abbās in the presence of Abū Bakr?” “Yes,” Hishām said. “Who of the two was the wrong one?” the man asked. Hishām did not want to say that al-‘Abbās was lest he should anger the caliph, and he did not want to say that ‘Alī was and thus contradict his own belief. So he said, “No one of them was wrong.” The man asked, “How can two men dispute with one another over something, yet neither of them be wrong?” Hishām said, “The two angels disputed with one another in the presence of David, peace be upon him, and neither of them was wrong; for they wanted to draw David’s attention to his own sin. These two men were in a similar situation and only wanted to draw Abū Bakr’s attention to his own sin.” The man fell silent, and the caliph ordered that a big gift be given to Hishām.

Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām went to see Abū al-Hudhayl al-‘Allāf, who had grown old and had not entered into a debate in a long time, whereas Ibrāhīm was of a young age. Ibrāhīm said, “Tell me about your decision to consider something an essence [*jamhar*] fearing it might be considered a material substance [*jism*]: did you then decide that it should not be considered an essence fearing it might be an accident, for an accident is weaker than an essence?” Abū al-Hudhayl spat in his face, so Ibrāhīm said to him, “What an ugly old man you are! How weak your argument is and how foolish your discernment is!”

Jahm [ibn Ṣafwān] encountered a Greek man who asked him, “Is it possible for you and me to talk about this worshiped entity of yours? Have you ever seen him?” “No,” Jahm said. “Have you touched him?” the Greek man asked. “No,” Jahm replied. “Have you tasted him?” the Greek man asked. “No,” Jahm answered. The Greek man then argued, “How then have you known him, when you have not perceived him by any of your five senses, of which your mind is a means of expression and can perceive only what information these senses convey to it?” Jahm stammered for a while then composed himself, redirected the questioning, and said to the Greek man, “Don’t you admit that you have a soul?” “I do,” the Greek man said. Jahm asked, “Have you seen it, tasted it, heard it, smelled it, or touched it?” “No,” the Greek man admitted. “How then,” concluded Jahm, “do you know that you have a soul?” The Greek man conceded [his error] to him.

A chapter on modesty

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “Modesty is all good. Modesty is an element of faith.” He also said, peace be on him, “God, most blessed and exalted, loves a person who is modest, clement, and chaste; and He dislikes a person who is foul-mouthed, inquisitive, and persistent.”

ʿAwn ibn ʿAbd Allāh said, “Modesty, clemency, and silence are [elements] of faith.”

Ibn ʿUmar said, “Modesty and faith are associated together. If one of them is removed, the other is too.”

He also said, “It is written in the Torah, ‘If you are not ashamed, do what you like.’” And he said, “Revivify modesty by associating yourselves with those who make you feel ashamed.”

Mentioning a modest man, an Arabian bedouin said, “He always makes you feel as if he cannot dispense with you, although [in fact] you are more in need of him; if you offend him, he forgives you as though he were the offender; and if you wrong him, he does good to you as though he were the wrong-doer.”

Laylā al-Akhyaliyya said:

He is a young man who is more modest than a modest girl
But is more courageous than a lion hiding in Khiffān.

[Khiffān: a lion-haunted swamp near Kūfa.]

Ibn Qays said:

Because of their mildness, you think they are deaf to indecencies
And dumb to abominations when obscenities are exchanged,
And sick in encounters, because of their modesty and chastity;
But they are like hiding lions when rising to defend honor.

Al-Shaʿbī said, “People lived together by [rules of] religion and piety for a period; then these were removed, and so they lived together by [norms of] modesty and mutual protection; then these were removed, and people only live together [today] because of desire and fear. And there will come [in future] what is worse than these.”

It was said, “Modesty increases one’s nobility.”

A poet said:

By your father, there is no good in life
And in the world if modesty is gone.

Another poet said:

When a young man has a shameless face,
He will do things as he wishes.
There will be no use to medicine
Or any thing with which you may treat him.
Nothing but modesty has prevented me
From many an ugly quality that I could have possessed.

ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God honor him, said, “Awe [of others] has been associated with failure, and modesty with deprivation.”

It was said:

Get rid of modesty when you go seeking something;
For modesty is associated with deprivation.

A proverb says, "Excessive modesty is an effeminate quality."

Al-Ḥasan said, "Whoever hides behind modesty has ignorance as his garment. Therefore, cut the garment of modesty into pieces, for he whose face is flimsy [in a face-off] has flimsy learning."

Describing modesty in the presence of al-Aḥnaf, a man said, "Modesty is fine to a certain extent; but if it goes beyond that, then call it what you like."

A poet said:

"Modesty is associated with deprivation,"
Thus said 'Alī, the Commander of the Faithful.
And know that an excess of it is an effeminate quality;
So get rid of it when seeking objects and [high] hopes.

Al-Shammākh said:

I deal with some people courteously, out of modesty, although
I may clearly see their breasts are full of grudge against me.

Ibn Abi Ḥāzim said:

Four qualities turn me away from foolishness and obscenities
And from vilifying close blood relatives:
Modesty, Islam, piety, and the fact that I am
Noble-minded; and someone like me can be harmful and useful.

Another poet said:

If a man is shameless, he is likely
To commit all manner of ugly acts.
In every matter, he is nosy; his secret
Is public; and his gift [to others] is harshness and snobbery.
He sees vilification as praise, meanness as high-mindedness;
And when admonished, his hearing is reluctant.
But so long as a young man is alive, there is hope
That he will achieve the best conditions of repentance.

A chapter containing a compendium of manners

God's education of His Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace

Abū 'Umar Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad [ibn 'Abd Rabbih] said, "The first thing we start with is [God's] education of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, then we deal with the Prophet's education of his community, and then with that of the wise men and religious scholars."

God educated His Prophet in the best of all ethical principles. He said to him, "And do not keep your hand chained to your neck, nor stretched out fully lest you [eventually] sit down blamed and exhausted." [Q. 17:29] He forbade him from being stingy as He forbade him from being a spendthrift, and He commanded him to be in a middle situation. He also said, may He be exalted, "And those who, when they spend, are neither extravagant nor parsimonious, but moderate in-between." [Q. 25:67]

God, most blessed and exalted, combined all maxims for His Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, in His perfect Book and He epitomized for him all noble traits of character in three utterances and said, "Take to forgiveness, bid what is honorable, and turn away from the ignorant." [Q. 7:199] By taking to forgiveness, he preserves relations with those who cut him off and pardons those who wronged him; by bidding what is honorable, he expresses fear of God, he overlooks forbidden things, and preserves his tongue from lying; by turning away from the ignorant, he raises himself above wrangling with the impudent and disputing with the stubborn.

Then God, most blessed and exalted, ordered him among other things in educating him to be of kind disposition and compassionate with his community. He said, "And lower your wing to the believers who follow you" [Q. 26:215] and He said, "And if you had been harsh and hard-hearted, they would have dispersed from around you" [Q. 3:159] and He said, may He be blessed and exalted, "A good deed and an evil deed are not equal. Repel with that which is best and, behold, he between whom and you there is an enmity will become as though he were a warm friend. But none will be granted it except those who are steadfast, and none will be granted it except those who are greatly fortunate." [Q. 41:34–35]

When the Prophet learned from almighty and sublime God, and these ethical characteristics became perfected in him, God, may He be blessed and exalted, said, "A Messenger has now come to you from among yourselves; it is grievous to him that you should suffer, for he is compassionate and merciful to the believers. But if they turn away, say, 'God is my sufficiency; there is no

god but He, and I put my trust in Him – He is the Lord of the great Throne.’”
[Q. 9:128–129]

**A chapter on the Prophet’s education of his community,
may God bless him and grant him peace**

Among the things by which the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, educated his community and urged its members to adhere to noble traits and pleasant companionship, and to wipe out discord and preserve blood relationships, is that he said, “My Lord has advised me to follow nine things, and I am advising you to follow them. He advised me to be sincere in secret and in public, to be just when content and when angry, to be economical when wealthy and when poor, to forgive the one who wrongs me, to give to the one who deprives me, to preserve relations with the one who cuts me off, to be ever thoughtful when silent, to remember [God] when speaking, and to offer moral lessons when giving an opinion.”

He also said, may God bless him and grant him peace, “I forbid you from gossiping, wasting wealth, and excessive questioning.”

And he said, may God bless him and grant him peace, “Don’t sit on the roadway; but if you have to, then lower your eyes, offer greetings, guide the lost, and help the weak.”

He also said, may God bless him and grant him peace, “Tie up the mouths of waterskins, turn over containers, close doors, and extinguish lamps; for the devil does not open a closed thing, undo a tie, or uncover a container [that is turned over].”

He said [to his Companions], may God bless him and grant him peace, “Shall I tell you who is the worst of people?” They said, “Yes, do, O Messenger of God.” He said, “The one who eats alone, withholds his support [from others], and whips his slave.”

Then he said, “Shall I tell you who is worse than that?” They said, “Yes, do, O Messenger of God.” He said, “The one who hates people and is hated by them.”

He said, “Fortify your wealth by almsgiving, treat your sick by charitable donations, and face affliction by the invocation [of God].”

He also said, “What is little and sufficient is better than what is plenty and causes distraction.”

And he said, “Muslims are equal in the value of their blood, the least one of them makes an effort to honor their common covenant of protection, and they are united against everyone else.”

He said, “Giving is better than receiving, and begin with your dependents.”

And he said, “Let not your right hand inflict harm on your left. And a believer will not be stung twice from a snake hole.”

He also said, “A man becomes many by his brother’s support.”

And he said, "Separate your utterances by intervening words seeking [God's] forgiveness, and seek the help of secrecy to achieve your objects."

He said, "The best friend is the one who, if you remember, helps you; and if you forget, reminds you."

And he said, "Only by his permission is a ruler led in his governance and offered honor."

He said, may God bless him and grant him peace, "A human being says, 'My possessions, my possessions!' Yet what he possesses is only what he eats and consumes, or what he wears and wears out, or what he gives away and spends."

He also said, "You will be anxious to have power; but what a good wet nurse it is, and what a bad weaning mother!"

And he said, "A judge should not rule between two persons when he is angry."

He said, "If you reveal yourselves to one another, you will not bury one another. And no man will perish who knows his own worth."

And he said, "People are like a group of one hundred camels, among which you can hardly find a single she-camel that is fit to be saddled. All people are equal like the teeth of a comb."

He also said, "May God have mercy on a human being who says something good and achieves a benefit, or who keeps silent and attains safety."

And he said, "The best wealth is a row of pollinated palm trees or a productive filly. And the best wealth is a sleepless, running fountain that belongs to a sleeping man."

On female horses, he said, "Their bellies are a treasure and their backs are a stronghold."

And he said, "No honest merchant will become poor, and no home in which there is vinegar will become devoid [of food]."

He said, "Fix learning in its place by writing."

And he said, "Visit after intervening absences, and you will be more loved."

He also said, "Hang your whip where it can be seen by your family."

A chapter on the education of wise men and religious scholars

A part of it on the merit of good manners

Advising his sons, a wise man said, “Courtesy [*adab*] is the noblest gem in quality, and the most precious of them in value. It raises persons of lowly lineage, helps one acquire one’s objects of sublime desire, strengthens one without the need for tribal support, and increases one’s helpers without the necessity for return obligations. Wear it then as a garment and adorn yourselves with it as an embellishment, and it will comfort you in moments of desolation and will bring together for you antagonistic hearts.”

Among things related about ‘Alī, peace be on him, is that he said, “He who is patient will prevail, and he who prevails will benefit; but he who is too modest will be deprived, and he who fears will fail. Whosoever seeks leadership should tolerate expediency. He who sees his own fault is blind to the faults of others. He who unsheathes a sword of wrong-doing will be killed by it, and he who digs a pit for his brother will fall in it. He who forgets his own error will find another’s error formidable. He who tears apart another’s veil will have the defects of his household revealed, and he who treats matters haughtily will perish. He who plunges into the depths of the sea will be drowned. He who has a high opinion of his own opinion will go astray, and he who is satisfied with his own mind will commit error. Whosoever acts haughtily strong with people will be humiliated. He who overworks will become bored. He who associates himself with the mean will be regarded with contempt, but he who sits with scholars will become respected. Whosoever enters evil companionships will be suspected, and whosoever has a good deportment will achieve his ends with ease. He whose speech is good will be met with reverence, and he who fears God will be successful. He who seeks to be led by ignorance will have abandoned the path of justice. He who knows his instant of death will have reduced his hope.”

Then ‘Alī recited the following verses:

Accept your brother despite his faults,
Overlook and cover up his sins.
Be patient with the untruth of a mean man
And be forbearing with the vicissitudes of Time.
Withhold responding [to evil] out of graciousness
And leave the oppressor to one who brings him to account.

Shabīb ibn Shayba said, “Seek seemliness [*adab*], for it is the essence of reason, an indicator of manliness, a friend in strange lands, a companion in desolation,

an embellishment in gatherings, and it will bring together for you antagonistic hearts.”

‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān said to his sons, “Seek seemliness; for when you need it, it will be a wealth for you; and when you don’t, it will be an embellishment for you.”

A wise man said, “Know that social prestige achieved by wealth stays with you as long as wealth stays; but social prestige achieved by good manners will not go away from you.”

Ibn al-Muqaffa‘ said, “If people honor you because of your wealth or power, don’t be pleased by that; for this honoring will vanish when wealth or power do. But be pleased if they honor you because of your religiosity or good manners.”

Al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays said, “The chief component of good manners is one’s manner of speaking. But there is no good in speaking without doing, nor in wealth without generosity, nor in friendship without loyalty, nor in jurisprudence without piety, nor in truthfulness without an intention [behind it].”

Maṣqala al-Zubayrī said, “A writer [*adīb*] cannot do without three things and two things: as for the three, they are rhetoric, eloquence, and good verbal expression; as for the two, they are knowledge of tradition and retention of information.”

It has been said, “Lineage is in need of good manners, and knowledge is in need of experience.”

Buzurjimihr said, “Fathers don’t bequeath to sons anything better than good manners, for by good manners they will acquire wealth and by ill manners [*al-jahl*] they will destroy it.”

Al-Fuḍayl ibn ‘Iyāḍ said, “Chief among the components of good manners is a man’s knowledge of his own worth.”

It has been said, “Good character is the best companion, good manners are the best inheritance, and success is the best leader.”

Sufyān al-Thawrī said, “Whoever knows himself will not be harmed by what people say about him.”

Anūshirwān asked al-Mūbadh (the scholar, in Persian), “What is the best of things?” He replied, “A pure natural disposition that is satisfied of good manners by a hint, and of learning by an allusion. And as a seed dies in a swamp, wisdom dies too by the death of this natural disposition.” “You have spoken truly,” Anūshirwān commented, “and that is why we have appointed you to the post you now hold.”

Ardashīr was asked, “Is good breeding [*adab*] or natural disposition stronger?” He answered, “Good breeding increases one’s insight, stimulates one’s thinking, and profits one’s sense of correctness. However, natural disposition is more powerful because faith, the growth of perspicacity, and the perfection of nourishment are in it.”

A wise man was asked, “What is the most helpful thing for one’s mind after an innate natural disposition?” He replied, “An acquired refinement [*adab*].”

It was said, "There are two kinds of refined culture: the instinctive one, which is the original one; and the one handed down by narration, which is the branch. Only from a root does anything branch out, and the root grows only by continued connectedness [to the branch]."

A poet said:

Only from a root have I seen a branch grow,
And only by learning have I seen knowledge begin.

Habīb said:

A sword is only a piece of iron; if you leave it
In its original state, it will not cut.

Another poet said:

God has not granted anyone a gift
Better than his mind and his behavior.
They are a young man's life and, if lost,
Losing his life is better for him.

Ibn ʿAbbās said, "Of the science of religion, it is sufficient for you to know what you cannot afford to be ignorant of; and of the science of literature [*adab*], it is sufficient for you to be able to narrate a proof-text and an example."

Ibn Qutayba said, "If you intend to be a scholar [*ʿālim*], seek only one branch of learning; and if you intend to be a man of letters [*adīb*], acquire the various branches of science."

Wise men have said, "If a man has clean clothes, abundant literary arts, and a sound religious creed, all his family and children will acquire his refinement and become righteous because of his righteousness."

A poet said:

I have observed that a man's righteousness makes his family righteous,
But if he becomes bad, the Lord of corruption will corrupt them.
He will be revered in the world because of his righteousness,
And, after death, he will be preserved through his family and children.

Diogenes was asked, "What qualities have the most praiseworthy consequences?" He replied, "Faith in God, may He be exalted, kindness to one's parents, love for scholars, and acceptance of good breeding [*adab*]."

It is narrated that God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, "He who does not have good manners does not have good sense."

It was said, "Good manners increase the merit and reputation of a man of reason, and they give him gentility and gracefulness."

On the subtlety of courtesy

Abū Bakr ibn Abī Shayba said, “Al-‘Abbās ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib was asked, ‘Are you the senior or is God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace?’ He replied, ‘He is senior to me, but I am more advanced in years than he is.’”

Abū Wā’il was asked, “Who is the senior, you or al-Rabi‘ ibn Khuthaym?” He replied, “I am senior to him in age and he is senior to me in reason.”

Abān ibn ‘Uthmān asked Ṭuways, the singer, “Am I the senior or are you?” He replied, “May I be your ransom! I attended the wedding of your blessed mother.”

‘Umar ibn Dharr was asked, “How devoted to you is your son?” He answered, “Whenever I walk by day, he walks behind me; whenever I walk by night, he walks in front of me; and he never ascends to an upper room when I am below him.”

One of the traditions related about ‘Ā’isha is that she said, “I have never seen God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, revere anyone as he revered his uncle al-‘Abbās.”

Whenever ‘Umar and ‘Uthmān came across al-‘Abbās, they both dismounted in reverence to him if they were riding.

Al-Riyāshī said on the authority of al-Aṣma‘ī, “Hārūn al-Rashīd asked ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Ṣāliḥ, ‘Is this house yours?’ [He replied, ‘It belongs to the Commander of the Faithful and to me through him.’]”

This report was mentioned earlier in the section on addressing kings, and so was the [ungrammatically formulated] question of al-Ḥajjāj to al-Sha‘bī, “How much is your stipend?” [which al-Sha‘bī politely answered ungrammatically too.]

Some of what we have said on the subtlety of courtesy [*adab*] is the following verse:

It is a courtesy which is like water: if you
Ever pour it, it will flow as water does.

On the courtesy of ‘Alī ibn Yaḥyā

Aḥmad ibn Abī Ṭāhir said, “I said to ‘Alī ibn Yaḥyā, ‘I have never seen anyone of more perfect courtesy than you!’ He said, ‘What will you say if you see Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm?’ I said that to Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm and he said, ‘What will you say if you see Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī?’ So I said that to Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī and he said, ‘What will you say if you see Ja‘far ibn Yaḥyā?’”

‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz said, “Rajā’ ibn Ḥaywa said to me, ‘I have never seen anyone of greater courtesy or of nobler companionship than your father. I was having an evening chat with him once when the lamp’s light darkened and the servant had gone to sleep. “Commander of the Faithful,” I said to him, “the lamp’s light has darkened and the servant has gone to sleep. If you permit me, I will fix it.” He said, “It is not honorable for a man to let his guest serve.” He took his cloak off his shoulders, went to the oil jar, poured some

oil from it into the lamp, fixed the wick, and returned. He put on his cloak again and said, "I got up, being ʿUmar; and I returned, remaining ʿUmar."'''

ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and a man who farted in the mosque

Al-ʿUtbi said on the authority of his father, "A man farted in the mosque in the presence of ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb; so when prayer time arrived, ʿUmar said, 'I urge the [unknown] person who farted to go and perform his ritual ablutions.' But nobody rose to go. Jarīr ibn ʿAbd Allāh said, 'Commander of the Faithful, urge us all to go and perform our ablutions.' 'You are right!' ʿUmar answered him, 'I have known you always to be a chieftain in the Jāhiliyya period and a legislator in the Islamic period. Do all rise and perform your ablutions.'"

Al-Shaḥḥām and al-Ḥasan

Al-Riyāshī said on the authority of al-Aṣmaʿī:

ʿUthmān al-Shaḥḥām related to me the following, "I said to al-Ḥasan, 'O Abū Saʿīd.' He said, 'At your service!' I asked him [in surprise], 'Are you saying *At your service* to me?' He said, 'I say it to my servant.'"

A poet said:

How wonderful it was when the wind became cold
In the valley of Ushayy and the young men there were slim.
They would serve others and be hospitable in their gatherings;
And when you traveled with them, they would be servants.
Whenever I mention them to people I befriend,
My love for them is increased by those people.

Courtesy in speaking and listening

Wise men have said, "The main element of all courtesy is to understand well and try to comprehend, and to listen intently to one's interlocutor."

Mentioning a certain group of people, al-Shaʿbī said, "I have never seen any group like them in a meeting who are better spoken in alternate turns or more understanding of what an interlocutor says."

Speaking of qualities that al-Shaʿbī ascribed to ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān, he said, "By God, I have always known him to adhere to three and to ignore three: he adhered to speaking well when he spoke, to listening intently when he was addressed, and to embarking on the least argumentation when he was contradicted; he ignored answering a mean person, arguing with a foolish man, and disputing with a stubborn individual."

A wise man said to his son, "My son, learn to listen well just as you learn to speak well. Let people know that you are more desirous of listening than you are of speaking. Be careful not to promise anything quickly which you must

later renege on by your action, so that people may know that you are more likely to do what you have not said than you are to say what you have not done.”

It has been said, “It is courteous not to try to confute someone in his speech. When someone else is asked a question, don’t answer on his behalf; if he speaks on any subject, don’t dispute with him, don’t interrupt him, and don’t show him that you are teaching him. If you are speaking with your friend and your argument overwhelms him, make it easy for him to come out of it and don’t show that you have defeated him. Learn to listen well just as you learn to speak well.”

Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said, “Speak to people so long as they keep their faces turned toward you.”

Abū ‘Abbād, the secretary, said, “If a speaker notices a listener not paying attention, let him ask him about [previous] parts of the conversation and the reason they have been said. If he finds that the listener is right, he should continue the conversation; otherwise, he should cut it off and deprive him of his geniality, and let him know what rudeness and loss of benefit lie in not listening well.”

Courtesy when sitting with others

A saying by the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace

Abū Bakr ibn Abī Shayba related that the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “Let no man cede his seat to another man, but let him make space for him.”

‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Umar used not to sit in the seat ceded by another man to him. He said, “Let no one cede his seat, but make space [for a newcomer] and God will make space for you.”

Abū Umāma said, “The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, came out to us; so we stood up for him. He said, ‘Don’t stand up as Persians do for their grandees.’ Subsequently no one of us stood up for him.”

Ibn ‘Umar said in one of his reports that the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “If I come out to you while you are seated, let no one stand up in front of my face. If I rise, stay as you are; and if I sit, stay as you are. [To do other than] that is a characteristic of the polytheists.”

He also said, may God bless him and grant him peace, “A man is more entitled [than others] to the back of his own mount, the foremost part of his own council, and the best part of his own bed. And whoever leaves his seat has a greater right to it [than others] when he comes back.”

He said, may God bless him and grant him peace, “If someone sits in your company, don’t rise to go before you ask his permission.”

A man sat in the company of al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī, may [God’s] contentment be with both of them, and al-Ḥasan said, “You have just sat down with us when we want to rise and go. Will you permit us?”

Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ said, “I have never stretched my leg in the presence of a person sitting with me, nor have I ever risen from my seat until he rose up to go.”

Ibrāhīm al-Nakhaʿī said, “If someone enters a home, let him sit where his host seats him.”

Abū Qilāba threw a cushion for a man to sit on but the latter rejected it. So Abū Qilāba said, “Have you not heard the [Prophet’s] saying, ‘Don’t reject your brother’s act of honoring you?’”

ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, said, “Only a donkey would reject an act honoring [him].”

Saʿīd ibn al-ʿĀṣ said, “I have three obligations toward the man who sits in my company: when he approaches, I welcome him; when he sits, I make space for him; and when he speaks, I turn my full attention to him.”

And he said, “I hate flies flying around a companion sitting with me, fearing they may annoy him.”

Muʿāwiya and al-Aḥnaf

Al-Haytham ibn ʿAdī said on the authority of ʿĀmir al-Shaʿbī, “As al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays entered the presence of Muʿāwiya, the latter gestured to him to sit, pointing to a cushion, but the former did not sit on it. Muʿāwiya asked him, ‘What prevents you from sitting on the cushion?’ Al-Aḥnaf replied, ‘Commander of the Faithful, Qays ibn ʿĀṣim advised his son, among other things, saying, “Don’t strive hard to reach the ruler, lest he be bored with you; don’t keep away from him, lest he forget you; and don’t sit on a bed or cushion of his – but leave a distance of one man’s seat or two between you and him.”’”

Al-Ḥasan said, “Sitting with a man without asking about his name and his father’s is the way the foolish sit together.”

That is why, when Shabīb ibn Shayba met Abū Jaʿfar during the circumambulation [of the Kaʿba in the pilgrimage] and did not know him but liked his appearance and manner, he said to him, “May God make you prosper, I would like to know you but deem you too exalted to be asked.” And Abū Jaʿfar said, “I am So-and-So, the son of So-and-So.”

Ziyād said, “I have never attended a gathering, in which I would not have left something that would have been mine if I had sat longer in it. Leaving what is mine is more preferable to me than taking what is not mine.”

He also said, “Beware of sitting in the most honored place in a gathering, even if your host seats you in it; for such seats are ones in which sitters do not last long.”

Al-Shaʿbī said, “To be invited to move from a far [seat] to a near one is more preferable to me than to be removed from a near [seat] to a far one.”

Ibn Ṭāhir and Abū al-Samrāʾ

It was reported that Abū al-Samrāʾ was one day with ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir when Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm was present with him. ʿAbd Allāh asked Ishāq to come closer

to him and whispered something to him, and the whispering between them continued for a long time. Abū al-Samrā' later reported, "I hesitated between staying to discover what they were saying and rising to go. When the conversation between them came to an end and Ishāq returned to his former position, 'Abd Allāh looked at me and said, 'O Abū al-Samrā':

When two confidants keep their secret from you by whispering,
Let your hearing be far from them so that you'll not know what they say.
Don't burden them with fear
For their secret talk when you sit nearby.'

"I have never seen a more honorable person or a gentler one in chastising than him. In his capacity as a prince, he refrained from chastening me for my lapse; meanwhile, he chastised me as an equal."

The Prophet said, may God bless him and grant him peace, "Each of you is indeed a mirror to his brother. If he finds fault with him, let him expunge it; and if he holds something against him, let him say to him, 'May no harm befall you,' and 'May God let harm be turned away from you.'"

It was said, "When two [different] prohibitions exist [in one situation], the greater one supersedes the smaller one."

Al-Muhallab ibn Abī Ṣufra said, "All that is worthwhile in life is having an enjoyable companion to sit with."

Courtesy when walking with others

Hishām ibn 'Abd al-Malik sent out his son as the head of the summer campaign. He sent out with him his own nephew and advised each of them to treat the other well. When they returned, he asked his nephew, "What do you think of your cousin?" He replied, "If you wish, I will summarize; and if you wish, I will elaborate." "Rather summarize," the caliph said. The nephew said, "We happened to come by a charger, and each of us left it for the other; and so we had not yet ridden it by the time we returned to you."

Yaḥyā ibn Aktham said, "I once walked with al-Ma'mūn in the garden of Mu'nisa bint al-Mahdī and was on the side which protected him from the sun. When he reached the end of the garden and wanted to come back, I wanted to go to his other side to protect him from the sun. 'Don't do that,' he said, 'and stay where you are so that I may protect you from the sun as you have protected me.' 'Commander of the Faithful,' I said, 'If I could, I would protect you from the heat of hellfire. How much more from the sun's!' He said, 'This is not a constituent of good company.' He walked on, protecting me from the sun as I had protected him."

Umar ibn Dharr was asked, "How well does your son treat you?" He replied, "I have never walked by day when he did not walk behind me, nor by night when he did not walk in front of me; nor has he ever gone up to a roof when I was under it."

Ziyād was told, “You have chosen Ḥāritha ibn Badr as an intimate companion, yet he is addicted to drinking.” He said, “Why would I not choose him as an intimate companion? Whenever I ask him about anything, I find he has knowledge of it; and whenever I confide a secret to him, he never divulges it; and whenever he and I go out together on our mounts, his knee never touches mine.”

Al-Hādī and Ibn Yazīd on a trip together

Muḥammad ibn Yazīd ibn ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz said, “I went out from Jurjān with the Commander of the Faithful, Mūsā al-Hādī. He said to me, ‘Either you bear me or I bear you.’ I understood what he wanted, and recited the verses of Ibn Širma:

I advise you in the first instance to revere God
 And your noble descent; but God comes first.
 If your people become chiefs, don’t envy them;
 And if you are chiefs, then be just.
 If you become needy, remain virtuous;
 And if wealth is your lot, then be generous.
 If a disaster befalls your people,
 Put yourselves at the service of your tribe.
 If they ask for a favor, don’t withhold it;
 And, in misfortunes, bear what they burden you with.

“So he ordered that I be given twenty thousand dirhams.”

Al-Hādī, Ibn Salm, and ʿAbd Allāh ibn Mālīk

It was said that Saʿīd ibn Salm was riding along with Mūsā al-Hādī, while the lance was borne by ʿAbd Allāh ibn Mālīk and the wind raised dust. ʿAbd Allāh continued to observe the position of Mūsā during the procession and force himself to ride parallel to the caliph; but when he did, Mūsā received the brunt of that dust. After the caliph endured this for a long time, he turned to Saʿīd ibn Salm and said, “Don’t you see what we are suffering at the hands of this traitor?” Saʿīd replied, “By God, Commander of the Faithful, he has not been remiss in trying hard but has been denied success.”

A chapter on greeting and seeking permission

The Prophet said, may God bless him and grant him peace, “Speak well, spread greetings of peace, feed the orphans, and pray at night while people are asleep.”

He also said, may God bless him and grant him peace, “The stingiest people are those who stint on offering greetings of peace.”

A man came to the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, and said, “On you be peace, O Messenger of God.” The Prophet said, “Don’t say,

‘On you be peace,’ for this is a greeting addressed to the dead. Rather say, ‘Peace be on you.’”

ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz and a group greeting him

ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz’s chief of guards said, “ʿUmar went out on a feast day, wearing a linen shirt and a turban wound around a cap. We rose and greeted him. ‘Nay,’ he said, ‘I am one and you are a group. It is I who should greet, and you respond.’ He then greeted and we responded. Then he walked on and we walked with him to the mosque.”

The Prophet said, may God bless him and grant him peace, “The one who walks should greet the one who sits; the one who rides should greet the one who is on foot; and the younger person should greet the older one.”

A man entered the presence of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, and said, “My father extends a greeting of peace to you.” The Prophet replied, “Peace be to you and your father.”

Ibn Masʿūd, Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, and al-Aswad

Ibrāhīm said on the authority of al-Aswad, “ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd said to me, ‘When you meet ʿUmar, extend to him a greeting of peace.’ When I met him and extended a greeting of peace to him, he said, ‘Peace be to you and him.’”

Sulaymān ibn Hishām and Ibn Mihrān

Maymūn ibn Mihrān went to see Sulaymān ibn Hishām, who was the governor of the Arabian Peninsula, and said, “Peace be to you.” Sulaymān asked him, “What prevented you from greeting me with my princely title?” Maymūn replied, “The governor should be greeted with his princely title only when he has people with him.”

Al-Ḥasan and Ibrāhīm ibn Mihrān

Abū Bakr ibn Shayba said, “Al-Ḥasan, Ibrāhīm, and Maymūn ibn Mihrān disliked having a man greet them by saying, ‘May God grant you long life’ unless he first said, ‘Peace be on you.’”

ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar was asked about what a man should say when entering a mosque or a home where there was nobody. He replied, “He should say, ‘Peace be on us and on God’s righteous servants.’”

A man passed by the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, while he was urinating. The man greeted the Prophet, but the Prophet did not return the peace greeting.

A man asked ʿĀʾisha, “How are you this morning?” She replied, “Enjoying God’s grace.”

A man asked Shurayḥ, “How are you this morning?” He replied, “Having a far-off hope, a shorter lifespan, and bad work.”

Sufyān al-Thawrī was asked, "How are you this morning?" He replied, "In a world in which guides are at a loss."

Seeking permission of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, while he was indoors, a man from the Banū ʿĀmir asked, "Shall I enter?" The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said to his servant, "Go out to this man and teach him how to seek permission. Tell him that he should say, 'Peace be on you, may I enter?'"

Jābir ibn ʿAbd Allāh said, "I sought the Prophet's permission to enter, may God bless him and grant him peace. He asked, 'Who are you?' I said, 'I.' He repeated [perhaps disapprovingly], 'I, I.'"

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, "You may seek permission thrice. If permission is granted, well and good; otherwise, you must go away."

ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with him, said, "The first time is permission, the second is deliberation, and the third is determination. They should then either give permission or deny permission."

A chapter on disciplining the young

Wise men have said, "He who disciplines his son as a boy will be pleased with him as an adult."

And they said, "Make an impression on clay so long as it is moist and shape a branch so long as it is pliable."

They also said, "He who disciplines his son distresses his envier."

Ibn ʿAbbās said, "Whoever has not sat in his boyhood where he dislikes will not sit in his adulthood where he likes."

A poet said:

If a person is unable to achieve a sense of honor as a youth,
He will find it difficult to seek it as a man of mature age.

It was said, "How hard it is to wean an adult and how difficult to reform an old man!"

A poet said:

You try to reform your wife after she has grown old;
Reforming an aged person is a strenuous exercise.

Shurayḥ wrote the following verses to his son's teacher:

He abandoned prayer and turned to mean friends,
And wanted to wrangle with filthy sinful persons.
He will surely come to you one early morning with a writ
Like that of al-Mutalammis [commanding his own death].
If he comes to you, give him a biting piece of your mind
Or admonish him in the manner of an astute, refined man.

But if you intend to beat him, then do so with a whip
 And when you reach three lashes, refrain from more.
 Know that, whatever you do, he still is
 The dearest soul to me despite the bitter drink he gives me.

Ṣāliḥ ibn ʿAbd al-Quddūs said:

The one whom you discipline in young age
 Is like a planted branch that you water
 Until you see it flourishing with leaves
 After you have seen it hard and dry.
 An old man will not abandon his habits
 Until he is buried in the soil of his grave.
 If he ever repents, he will soon return to his foolishness,
 Like a sick man who suffers a relapse.
 An ignorant man cannot be hurt by his enemies
 As much as he can be hurt by himself.

ʿAmr ibn ʿUtba said to his children’s teacher, “Let the first step in your betterment of my children be your betterment of yourself, for their eyes are on you: what is good in their opinion is what you do and what is bad is what you refrain from doing. Teach them the Book of God but don’t force it on them lest they become tired of it, and don’t leave them without it lest they stray from it[s principles]. Of Hadīth, teach them to narrate the choicest; and of poetry, the most virtuous. Don’t move them from one science to another until they master the first, for crowding the mind with words is a cause of confused understanding. Teach them the norms of the wise and let them avoid conversation with women. And don’t depend on being excused by me for I have depended on you as a man of sufficiency.”

A chapter on the love of children

Muʿāwiya sent for al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays and asked him, “Abū Baḥr, what do you think of children?” “They are the fruits of our hearts and the props of our backs,” al-Aḥnaf replied, “We are a humble ground for them and a shady sky. If they ask for anything, give it to them; and if they become angry, pacify them; they will then give you their affection and will love you to their utmost. And don’t be strict with them lest they get tired of life with you and wish you would die.” “What a good man you are, Aḥnaf,” Muʿāwiya said. “When you came to me, my heart was full of anger at [my son] Yazīd and you have pulled it out.” When al-Aḥnaf went away, Muʿāwiya sent Yazīd two hundred thousand dirhams and two hundred robes. Yazīd shared half of these with al-Aḥnaf and sent him one hundred thousand dirhams and one hundred robes.

ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar used to love his son Sālim so excessively that people reproached him for that. He said:

They reproach me for Sālim and I reproach them,
For Sālim is the apple of my eye.

And he said, "My son Sālim loves God to such an extent that if he did not fear Him, he would not have disobeyed Him."

Yaḥyā ibn al-Yamān used to love his son Dāwūd so excessively that he said one day, "The major scholars of Ḥadīth are four: there was 'Abd Allāh, then 'Alqama, then Ibrāhīm, and then you Dāwūd."

And he said, "I married Dāwūd's mother and we had nothing to wrap him in, so I bought him clothing for a *dāniq* [one-sixth of a dirham]."

Zayd ibn 'Alī said to his son, "My son, God has not accepted you [as a son to me], so He commended me to you; and He accepted me [as a father to you], so He warned me against you. Know that the best parents to children are those whose love does not lead them to be lax, and the best children to parents are those whose dereliction does not lead them to be recalcitrant."

In the Ḥadīth ascribed to the Prophet himself we read, "The wind carrying a child's scent is like that of Paradise." We also read, "Children are some of God's sweet basil."

When the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, was told of the birth of Fāṭima, he said, "A sweet basil shoot that I will smell. Her subsistence will be provided by God."

'Amr ibn al-ʿĀṣ went in to see Muʿāwiya who was holding his own daughter in his hands. "Who is this?" 'Amr asked. "This is the apple of my heart," replied Muʿāwiya. "Put her away from you," counseled 'Amr, "for, by God, females give birth to enemies, get married to distant strangers, and bequeath grudges." "Don't say that, O 'Amr," Muʿāwiya responded, "for, by God, there is no one better than they to take care of the sick, lament the dead, or give comforting help in sorrows. And many a sister's son benefits his mother's brother."

Ḥiṭṭān ibn al-Muʿallā al-Ṭāʾī said:

If it were not for little daughters as downy as young grouse
Crowding one another [in the nest],
I would have had extensive wandering
In the big wide world.
But our children among us
Are our hearts waling on the ground.

ʿUbayd Allāh ibn Abī Bakra said, "The death of a child is a heartbreak that will not heal until the end of time."

ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb saw a man carrying a child around his neck and he asked, "Who is he to you?" The man replied, "My son, O Commander of the Faithful." ʿUmar remarked, "He will indeed charm you as long as he lives, and he will bring you sorrow if he dies."

Fāṭima, the daughter of God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, was making al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī, may God be pleased with both of them, dance [in her lap as a baby] and saying:

My little son resembles the Prophet
And he does not resemble 'Alī.

Al-Zubayr was making his son 'Urwa dance and saying:

He is white, from the family of Abū 'Atīq.
He is blessed, from the offspring of al-Ṣiddīq.
I take as much pleasure in him as I do in my saliva.

An Arab bedouin was making his son dance and saying:

I love him as a miser who, having tasted poverty
Then becoming rich, loves his wealth.
If he wants to spend it all, it is up to him.

Another said while making his son dance:

What I know of him is his little sleepiness
And a levity in his head that comes to my head.

A man from the tribe of Ṭayyī? who was a highway robber died and left a suckling babe. The baby's mother made her baby dance, saying:

I wish he were a highway robber
Who did not need a companion.
He spread fear in mountain passes and paths,
But they hardly showed any pity on him.

'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān said, "Our love for al-Walid harmed us, for we did not discipline him and it was as though he disciplined us."

Hārūn al-Rashīd asked his son al-Muṭaṣim [when the latter was young], "What happened to your page So-and-So?" Al-Muṭaṣim replied, "He died and [thus] rested from the *kuttāb* [elementary Qur'ān school]." Hārūn asked, "Has the *kuttāb* had that [adverse] an effect on you? By God, you shall never [again] attend it." And he sent him out to the desert where he learned eloquence [from the bedouin], having been illiterate, and he is the one known as Ibn Mārīda.

Ibrāhīm, peace be on him, and the angel of death

A report about Ibrāhīm, Friend of the Merciful [God], says that he was one of the most fervidly attached people [to his offspring]. When he was about to die, the angel of death came to him in the shape of a man he did not recognize. "Who let you enter my house?" he asked him. "The One who made you reside in it for so-and-so years," the angel replied. "And who are you?" Ibrāhīm enquired.

“I am the angel of death,” the angel replied, “and I’ve come to take your soul.” Ibrāhīm pleaded, “Will you leave me a moment so that I may bid my son Ishāq farewell?” “Yes,” the angel replied. So Ibrāhīm sent for Ishāq and told him the news. Ishāq clung to his father and began to weep, heart-stricken with grief. The angel of death left them alone, and implored God, “O Lord, your [would-be] sacrificial victim Ishāq is clinging to your Friend.” God said to him, “Tell him I have granted him a respite.” So he did, and Ishāq disentangled himself from his father. Ibrāhīm then went into a room to sleep and the angel of death seized his soul as he slept.

A chapter on asking assistance from one’s son

God, may He be blessed and exalted, said speaking about His servant Zakariyyā who had prayed to Him for a son, “And Zakariyyā, when he called unto his Lord, ‘O my Lord, leave me not childless, though You are the best of inheritors.’” [Q. 21:89]

And He said, “And I fear my kinsfolk after I die, for my wife is barren. So grant me a successor to be my heir and the heir of the House of Ya‘qūb; and make him, my Lord, well-pleasing.” [Q. 19:5–6]

Kinsfolk [*mawālī*] here means cousins.

A poet said:

Whoever has support will shake off his iniquity,
But a humble person is one who has no support.
His hands are useless if he has little assistance
But he can reject injustice if large numbers support him.

Al-‘Utbī said, “When Abū Barā’ ‘Āmir ibn Mālik became old and his nephews considered him weak and senile and he had no sons to protect him, he said:

I pushed you away from me but pushing away with the palm
Is ineffective if the palm is not helped by the fingers.
My forbearance makes me weak; so does your foolish behavior
Toward me and the fact that I don’t attack a foolish man.”

Another poet said:

Wolves attack the one who has no dogs
But they fear the power of one prepared to defend himself.

A chapter on learning from life experiences

Wise men have said, “Life experiences are enough to teach a person, and the vicissitudes of time are sufficient to admonish him.”

They also said, “Time is a good teacher and reason, a good guide.”

Ḥabīb said:

Have you tried to guide me? My reason is my guide.
Or have you wanted to educate me? Time is my educator.

Ibrāhīm ibn Shakla said:

He whose parents have not educated him
Will be educated by the nights and days.
How many a noble person they have humbled
And he could not gain a victory against them.
Who has ever been spared by the hand of Time
Or been given tranquility in his homeland?
Everyone overlooks Time's events
But has a grudge against Time.

Another poet said:

Days leave one no excuse—
And a clever man learns from them.

It was said, "Time is a good informer about what remains in life by telling what has passed of it."

It was also said, "What they have experienced in life is a sufficient informer to the clever."

ʿĪsā ibn Maryam was asked, "Who educated you?" He replied, "No one. But I have seen that foolishness is ugly, so I avoided it."

A chapter on living your days meekly

Wise men have said, "Live your days meekly and do not run a race with time lest you stumble."

A poet said:

Whoever races with Time will stumble,
And can't be steadied against Time's steps.
So, keep step with Time
And run with it at its pace.

Bashshār al-ʿUqaylī said:

O blamer: difficulty will end
And ease is likely tomorrow.
I will be only like Time: if it wakes up,
I will; and if it plays the fool, I will too.

Another poet said:

Be a fool with the foolish when you meet them,
 And do the stupid things that the stupid do.
 Make errors when you meet a man who errs
 Whether he is serious or is jesting.
 I found that a man would be miserable by using his reason
 Just as in earlier times he was happy by using it.

Another poet said:

If destiny could have its way,
 It would equate the incapable and the determined.

Another poet said:

The cause obstructing a judicious man's fortune
 Is the same one that brings about a stupid man's.

A proverb says, "Lower yourself to [vicissitudes], they will pass you by."
 On this theme, we said:

Lower yourself to Time, and it will safely pass you by.
 If they say, "You're submissive," say, "Submissive I am."

Habib said:

It was a burning grief, and then it subsided
 Just as every liquid runs to the lowest level.

Habib also said:

Whatever humiliation Time inflicts on you,
 Dance to the evil monkey dominating its Time.

Another poet said:

Time does not remain unchanged:
 It must either progress or regress.
 If it afflicts you with adversity,
 Be patient for Time is not patient.
 Be patient with Time that weighs on you,
 For this is the way that ages have passed
 Sometimes in joy and sometimes in sorrow,
 But neither sorrow nor joy lasted.

And another poet said:

May God forgive the one who regards worry with equanimity
 And is sure misfortunes keep going around.
 In the evening, the world brings other things than it does in the morning,

And the nights bring union or separation,
 Some of their stars rise and others set.
 You wish that joy would abide among the joyful,
 But it is impossible that any joy should last.

Another poet said:

With regard to you, I will wait for the vicissitudes of Time;
 Perhaps they will bring back union – which is more beautiful.

A chapter on self-restraint from evil speech, even if it is false

Wise men have said, “Beware of doing something that ought to be apologized for.”

They also said, “Whoever exposes himself to accusations will not be safe from other people’s bad opinion of him.”

And they said, “Of evil, it suffices you just to hear it.”

And they said, “[Evil] speech is a sufficient shame, even if it is false.”

A poet said:

Whoever gives a motive to people to blame him,
 Will be blamed by them, both rightly and wrongly.
 Evil speech is faster to reach the people
 Intended by it than is a torrent rushing downhill.

Another poet said:

That has already been said, rightly or wrongly.
 What is your excuse for words that have been said?

Aristotle said to Alexander, “When people are capable of speaking, they are also capable of doing. So beware of their speaking; you will be safe from their doing.”

Imru’ al-Qays said:

... A wound inflicted by the tongue is like one inflicted by the hand.

Al-Akhtal said:

... Words pierce what needles do not.

Ya‘qūb al-Ḥamdūnī said:

A wound inflicted by a sword may be hopefully healed,
 But there is no healing for a wound inflicted by the tongue.

Another poet said:

They said something which, if true, I would have won with;
 Who will make me believe what they said, and make me a liar?

A chapter on the courtesy of blessing others when sneezing

Abū Bakr ibn Abī Shayba related that the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “Don’t say ‘Bless you’ to one who sneezes until he praises God; if he does not praise Him, don’t say ‘Bless you’ to him.”

And he said, “When anyone of you sneezes and praises God, say ‘Bless you’ to him; if he does not praise God, don’t say ‘Bless you’ to him.”

‘Alī, may God be pleased with him, said, “You should say ‘Bless you’ up to three times to the one who sneezes; but if he sneezes more, there is an ailment in his head.”

Ibn ‘Umar sneezed and those present said, “May God have mercy on you.” He responded, “May God guide you and set your minds at peace.”

‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib sneezed, so he praised God. Those present said to him, “May God have mercy on you.” He responded, “May God pardon me and you.”

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, said, “When anyone of you sneezes, say to him ‘Bless you’ up to three times; if he sneezes more, say to him, ‘You have a cold.’”

Someone said, “One must say ‘Bless you’ only once.”

A chapter on permitting a kiss

‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Laylā said on the authority of ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Umar, “We used to kiss the hand of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace.”

Wakī‘ said on the authority of Sufyān, “Abū ‘Ubayda kissed the hand of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb.”

Al-Sha‘bī said in one of his reports, “The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, met Ja‘far ibn Abī Ṭālib; so he embraced him and kissed him between his eyes.”

Iyās ibn Dagħfal said, “I saw Abū Naḍra kiss al-Ḥasan’s cheek.”

Al-Shaybānī said on the authority of Abū al-Ḥasan who heard this report from Muṣ‘ab, “I saw a man enter the mosque where ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn was, may God be pleased with both of them. The man kissed ‘Alī’s hand and raised it to his own eyes, and ‘Alī did not forbid him.”

Al-‘Utbi said, “A man entered into the presence of Hishām ibn ‘Abd al-Malik and kissed his hand. ‘Fie!’ Hishām exclaimed, ‘The Arabs only kiss hands out of fear and the Persians out of submission.’”

A man asked permission to kiss al-Ma‘mūn’s hand and the latter responded, “A kiss is a humiliation to a believer, and a deception by a non-Muslim protected person; you have no need to be humiliated, and we have no need to be deceived.”

Abū Dulāma asked permission to kiss al-Mahdi’s hand and the latter denied him that. Abū Dulāma said, “You have not denied me anything easier for my dependents to lose than this.”

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, “Abū Bakr al-Hajarī entered the presence of al-Manṣūr and said, ‘The teeth in my mouth have grown weak and shaky, and you belong to a blessed family. If you permit me to kiss your head, God will perhaps preserve my remaining teeth.’ Al-Manṣūr responded, ‘Choose either this or a reward.’ Abū Bakr said, ‘Commander of the Faithful, it is easier for me not to have a single tooth remain in my mouth than to lose a dirham from the reward.’ Al-Manṣūr laughed and commanded that he be given a reward.”

It was said, “An imam should be kissed on his hand, a father on his head, a brother on his cheek, a sister on her chest, and a wife on her mouth.”

A chapter on the courtesy of visiting

Abū ʿAmr ibn al-ʿAlāʾ became sick and a friend of his entered to see him and said to him, “I would have liked to spend this night having a party with you.” Abū ʿAmr replied, “You are healthy and I am sick. Health will not allow you to party, and sickness will not let me sleep. I ask God to grant thankfulness to the healthy, and patience to the sick.”

Paying a visit to ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Marwān when the latter was sick, Kuthayyir ʿAzza said to him, “If your joy becomes perfect only when you are healthy and I am sick, I would have asked my Lord to move your affliction to me; but I ask God to grant you health, O prince, and to grant me grace under your patronage.” ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz laughed and commanded that he be given a reward. Kuthayyir left, reciting the following verses:

We visit our sick master and the master of others,
I wish the complaint [of illness] was that of the visitors.
If ransom were acceptable, I would have ransomed him
By the choicest of my newly acquired and inherited wealth.

A man of letters wrote to a sick person:

I was informed that you are sick and I said to them:
“May my soul be his ransom against all evil.”
I wish his sickness had befallen me and that he had
The reward of the sick patient, and I remained unrewarded.

Another wrote to a sick person:

We would protect you, if given what we like and wish for you,
Ours would be the complaint and yours, the reward.

Yaḥyā ibn Khālīd and a poet who fell sick

A poet used to frequent the presence of Yaḥyā ibn Khālīd ibn Barmak and eulogized him but, for many days, he was absent from him because of a sickness that had befallen him. Yaḥyā did not miss him and did not ask about him. When the poet recovered from his illness, he wrote the following verses to Yaḥyā:

O prince, may God honor you
 And keep you for me a long time.
 May God mend your ways, did you consider it nice
 – So that I too might consider it likewise –
 That I was absent from you for long
 And you did not send a messenger to [ask about] me?
 Was this because of an offense I committed? I know
 Of nothing I did but thanking you for your abundant giving.
 Or was this because of being bored with me? I've never known
 You ever to be bored of a caring friend like me.
 God has bestowed recovery on me, and I complained little
 Of anything I have experienced.
 I ate partridge, a food with which
 My illness vanished like a setting star—
 It is as if I am in front of you again: I shall come to
 You tomorrow as soon as I find my way to you.

The minister wrote back to him, apologizing:

May God avert from you Time's misfortunes,
 And keep it far from you that you should be sick [again]!
 I swear to God that I did not know [you were sick],
 But this apology is not [sufficiently] permissible or acceptable.
 Perhaps if I had known [you were sick] I would have visited
 You repeatedly for a month, and that would have been [too] little.
 Do show me a way to cling to an apology,
 As I can find no way myself to it.
 Often in the past have gracious men been gracious to others,
 And often have dear friends forgiven their dear friends.

Al-Muṭaṣṣim wrote to 'Abd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir:

How hard for me it is to see you sick
 Or to know that illness is afflicting you!
 I wish I could have power over my health.
 If I could, I would loan it to you, morning and evening.
 You would then remain healthy through my health,
 And I would be a substitute for what had afflicted you.
 I am a brother of yours complaining of what you complain of.
 Such is a true friend when he loves a true friend.

Yaḥyā ibn Khālīd fell sick, and whenever Ismā'īl ibn Ṣubayḥ, the secretary,
 visited him, he used to stand at his bed's head and pray for him. Before he left,
 he used to ask the chamberlain about Yaḥyā's sleep, food, and drink. When
 Yaḥyā recovered, he said, "Nobody [really and meaningfully] visited me during
 my sickness but Ismā'īl ibn Ṣubayḥ."

A poet said:

Visiting a [sick] man should be once every two days
 And it should be as short as the wink of an eye.
 Don't ever tire a sick man with an interrogation;
 Sufficient for you should be a couple of words.

Bakr ibn 'Abd Allāh said to a group of people who visited him while he was sick and sat with him for a long time, "A sick man should be just *called on*, but a healthy man can be *visited*."

Sufyān al-Thawrī said, "The stupidity of visitors is harsher for the sick than their sickness itself: they come at an inopportune time and tarry too long."

A man went to visit 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz while the latter was sick, and he asked him what his disease was. When he was told, he said, "So-and-So died of this disease, as well as So-and-So." 'Umar said, "When you visit the sick, don't announce to them the death of the dead; and when you leave us, don't come back."

Ibn 'Abbās said, "If you enter to visit someone who is dying, give him good news so that he may meet his Lord with cheer, and prompt him to recite the testimony [that there is no god but God and that Muḥammad is God's Messenger]. And don't tire him out."

Al-A'mash fell sick and people bored him by asking about his health, so he wrote down his condition on a piece of paper and put it by his head. When anyone asked him about his health, he said, "Here is the report on the piece of paper. Read it."

A poet said:

My beloved fell sick, so I visited him,
 But I became sick because of my concern for him.
 So he came to visit me
 And I recovered on seeing him.

Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir fell sick, so he wrote to his brother 'Ubayd Allāh ibn 'Abd Allāh:

Despite your estrangement, I have found
 Evidence of your [good] deeds.
 I became sick but missed nothing
 As I missed your messenger's visit to me.
 If you were to fall sick and I found
 No way to help me reach you,
 My eyes would be filled with a desire
 For sleep so that I might see you in my repose.

His brother answered:

My eyes have found no sleep,
 Nor have I tasted repose.
 O my brother, full of abounding love,

Who is equal to the pupil of my eye:
 I was prevented by my heart's tenderness
 From coming to you with other visitors.
 If I hear your moan with my ears,
 My heart will be cut into pieces.

Muḥammad ibn Yazīd said:

O sick woman, I redeem you by myself from the pain
 Of illness: Is there a way that I can meet you?
 If the veil prevents me from seeing you,
 Grief and weeping for you are not veiled from me.

Muḥammad ibn Yazīd said, "Abū Duhmān recited to me his own verse after having visited one of the commanders:

Not with our newly acquired and inherited wealth but
 With our souls do we protect you from causes of illness.
 May the harm afflicting you afflict us, all your visitors,
 And if they express fear of what I say, let it be mine alone."

Abū Tammām al-Ṭāʾī wrote to Mālik ibn Ṭawq concerning an ailment he complained of:

How many a grief have generosity, praise, and
 Honorable deeds suffered on account of your unrest!
 In your afflicted sleep and in your insomnia,
 May God grant you health
 That will dispel sickness from your body,
 Just as blameworthy deeds were dispelled from your character.

Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh went to visit al-Mutawakkil during an ailment he complained of, and he recited the following verses to him:

May God repel evil from the soul of our Imam
 And may all of us be death's target instead of him.
 I wish that the illness he suffers from
 Would afflict all his visitors, rather than him.
 The Imam is a compensation for our loss of all others,
 But all others cannot be a substitute for him to us.
 If his soul remains safe, I will not care
 If all God's servants perish and become extinct.

Another poet said the following about one of the commanders:

He fell ill, and so the whole world became ill for his illness.
 He fell ill, and so intrepidity and generosity became ill too.
 When he recovered, glory shone; uncertainty,
 Sorrows and illness were driven away.

Qays, the madman of Banū ʿĀmir, was told that Laylā [his beloved] was sick in Iraq, so he said:

They tell me that Laylā is sick in Iraq,
 Why then do you shun her when you are a friend?
 May God heal the sick ones in Iraq, for I
 Have compassion on everyone with a health complaint in Iraq.

Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Ṭāhir said:

May God grant you health that will make you
 Dispense with your need to call me and to be patient.
 This lethargy of yours isn't because of illness that befell you,
 But because your eyes' lethargy moved to your body.
 O you, whose eyelids are languid, revive a young man
 You have killed with your eyelids, not with your hand.

Another poet said:

O you, who are my hope: How are you faring with your pain?
 And how are you doing with the lethargy you complain of?
 I have counted two days since
 I have not seen the shine of your smiling lips.
 I envied your fever when I was told
 That it kissed you on your mouth.

Suḥaym, the slave of Banū al-Ḥashās, said:

The women gathered from sundry places: three and four,
 And one more, until they were fully eight.
 They came forth from the farthest tents to visit me—
 Oh! But only one of the visitors is [the cause] of my sickness.

Al-ʿAbbās ibn al-Aḥnaf said:

She said, "I fell sick." So I visited her, but she was annoyed.
 It is she who is healthy and I, the visitor, who am sick.
 By God, if all hearts were as harsh as her heart,
 No father would take pity on his sick child.

Al-Wāthiq said:

May the lethargy be in me, not in you.
 I'll redeem you by myself, my mother, and my father.
 I was told you had a headache, and as soon as
 I heard that, my head was split with pain.

Muḥammad ibn Yazīd al-Mubarrid recited the following verses by ʿUlayya bint al-Mahdī:

You pretended to be sick in order to worry me.
 Wanting to kill me, you have succeeded in that.
 You asked my visitors, "How do you think he is?"
 They said, "He's been killed." You said, "The easiest to perish."
 If I have been annoyed that you have hurt me,
 I am pleased that the thought of me has occurred to you.

Some of what we have said on this theme is the following:

The soul of generosity is sick in the folds of heights
 Remonstrating to glory, in a body seized with illness.
 You're not alone in being overcome by paleness and weakness;
 We are all, because of you, weak and pale.
 O you, who have a veil of your own majesty,
 Although it appears to you unveiled:
 The Revealer of the harm of God's prophet, Job,
 Has laid His hand on you to reveal harm.

Similarly, we said:

No wonder if lethargy and harm befall you,
 The sun may be eclipsed, and even the moon.
 O [you,] beauty of the moon, whose freshness has withered,
 May my hearing and sight be the redemption of your light.
 If your body has been crushed by burning fever,
 This is the manner the lethal lion may become indisposed.
 If [you,] the sharp scimitar's blade, are blunted,
 Oftentimes earlier have sharp-edged swords been dented.
 [You are] the soul of glory embodied in noble deeds,
 It is as if morning is breaking out of [your] cheeks.
 If he had been afflicted by anything other than destiny,
 I would have appreciated that, but he was afflicted by destiny.

We have also said on this theme:

No wonder if lethargy has taken from you what it had asked for,
 The moon may be eclipsed sometimes when it is full.
 Whenever you complain of one single illness,
 Generosity complains of many out of love for it.

Courtesy in embracing

Sufyān ibn ʿUyayna and Mālik

Abū Bakr ibn Muḥammad said:

Saʿīd ibn Ishāq related to us on the authority of Ibn Yūnus al-Madinī that he said, "I was sitting with Mālik ibn Anas when Sufyān ibn ʿUyayna at the door asked permission to enter. Mālik said, 'He is a righteous man, a follower of

tradition. Let him in.’ So Sufyān entered and said, ‘Peace be to you, God’s mercy, and His blessings.’ Mālik returned the greeting and Sufyān said, ‘A special peace greeting and a general one be to you, Abū ‘Abd Allāh, and God’s mercy.’ Mālik said, ‘And to you be peace, Abū Muḥammad, and God’s mercy.’ Mālik then shook hands with him, saying, ‘Abū Muḥammad, if it were not something unprecedented, we would have embraced you.’ Sufyān said, ‘Someone who is better than both of us has embraced [a guest], namely, God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace.’ Mālik enquired, ‘Ja‘far?’ ‘Yes,’ Sufyān replied. Mālik said, ‘That was a special tradition, Abū Muḥammad, not a general one.’ Sufyān said, ‘What was general for Ja‘far is general for us too, and what was special for him is special for us too – if we are righteous. Will you permit me to relate traditions in your council?’ ‘Yes, Abū Muḥammad,’ Mālik agreed. Sufyān said, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ṭāwūs related to me on the authority of his father, who had heard it from ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās, that, when Ja‘far returned from the land of Abyssinia, the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, embraced him and gave him a kiss between his eyes, saying that, among all people, Ja‘far resembled him most both in looks and in character.’”

A chapter on good manners in managing one’s livelihood

It was said, “Whoever works on his land thoroughly, I shall fill his home thoroughly with bread.”

It was also said, “A garment says to its owner, ‘Honor me on the inside and I shall honor you on the outside.’”

‘Ā’isha said, “A spindle in a woman’s hand is better than a spear in the hand of a man who fights for the cause of God.”

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said, “Don’t exhaust the face of the earth, for its fat is in its face.”

He also said, “Make a separation between your most vulnerable mortal spots and, instead of one sheep, have two.”

And he said, “Knead your dough well, for it is one of the two [sources of] incremental yields.”

Abū Bakr said to a servant of his who traded in clothes, “If the garment [you are selling] is long and flowing, spread it out while standing; and if it is short, spread it out while you are sitting. For trade is a haggling act.”

‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān said, “Whoever possesses anything at hand, let him manage it well; for he lives in a time when, if he becomes needy, the first thing he will change is his religion.”

A chapter on good manners when eating with others

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “When any one of you eats, let him eat using his right hand and let him drink using his right hand; for Satan eats using his left hand and drinks using his left hand.”

Bilāl and al-Jārūd

Muḥammad ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī said, “When Bilāl ibn Abī Burda was commander of Basra, he once asked al-Jārūd ibn Abī Sabra al-Hudhālī, ‘Have you ever been at a meal of this old man’s?’ – he meant ‘Abd al-Aḳlā ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Āmir. ‘Yes,’ al-Jārūd replied. ‘Describe it for me,’ Bilāl said. ‘We come to him,’ al-Jārūd began, ‘and find him stretched out, that is sleeping. So we sit down until he wakes up and permits us to exchange conversation with him. When we talk to him, he listens well; and when he talks to us, he speaks well. Then he calls for his meal, having asked that no one of his maids and his children’s mothers should serve when the meal is spread out. His cook then comes and stands in front of him, and he asks him, “What do you have [for us to eat]?” and the cook says. “I have such-and-such,” enumerating the dishes he has, al-Jārūd wanting each man of his guests to prepare himself and his appetite for the food he desires to eat. The kinds of dishes are then brought from here and there, and placed on the meal sheet. A broth with soaked bread is next brought, gray in color because of the pepper, and speckled because of the chickpeas, and having two edges of chunks of meat on their bones. ‘Abd al-Aḳlā eats sparingly until he thinks the people have almost had their fill, then he kneels on his knees and resumes eating with them.’ Ibn Abī Burda said, ‘What a fine man ‘Abd al-Aḳlā is! And how self-controlled he is on hearing teeth grinding together!’”

An Arab bedouin was present at a meal with Hishām ibn ‘Abd al-Malik. While eating with him, a hair was stuck to the Arab bedouin’s mouthful; so Hishām said to him, “You have a hair in your mouthful, O Arab bedouin.” The Arab bedouin rejoined, “I see that you are observing me so closely to even see a hair in my mouthful! By God, I shall never again eat a meal with you.” He then left, saying:

Death is indeed better than visiting a stingy man who
Deliberately observes the edges of a morsel to be eaten.

Al-Manṣūr and an Arab bedouin

Muḥammad ibn Zayd said, “A general was once eating with Abū Ja‘far al-Manṣūr whose two sons Muḥammad al-Mahdī and Ṣāliḥ were at the same meal. While the man was eating from a broth with soaked bread that was in front of them, some of the food fell from his mouth into the bowl, and al-Mahdī and his brother felt perhaps disgusted at continuing to eat with him. Abū Ja‘far took the food that had fallen from the man’s mouth and ate it. The man turned to him and said, ‘Commander of the Faithful, this world would be the least and easiest thing for me to abandon for your sake; but, by God, in order to please you, I would indeed abandon this world and the next.’”

Al-Manṣūr, his chamberlain al-Rabīʿ, and a Hāshimite

Ibrāhīm ibn al-Sindī related that a young man from Banū Hāshim used to often enter the presence of al-Manṣūr, greet him from a distance, and leave. One day he came in and al-Manṣūr brought him closer and asked him to join him at dinner. “I have eaten my dinner,” the young man said. Al-Rabīʿ, al-Manṣūr’s chamberlain, granted the young man a respite but then thought he had not understood his faux pas. When he was leaving, and was behind the curtain, al-Rabīʿ gave him a shove in the back. The young man reported this treatment to his uncles, complaining of the chamberlain who had shoved him in the back. On the morrow, they came to Abū Jaʿfar [al-Manṣūr] and reported that al-Rabīʿ had badly treated the young man by doing such and such. Abū Jaʿfar said to them, “Al-Rabīʿ would not have committed such an act unless he had a good reason. If you like, we will refrain from doing anything and will ignore the matter; or if you like, I will ask him and let you hear his answer.” “We would rather that the Commander of the Faithful ask him, and we will hear his answer.” So al-Manṣūr called the chamberlain and asked him, and the latter said, “This young man used to come in, greet [us] from a distance, and leave. Yesterday, the Commander of the Faithful brought him closer and let him greet him close at hand; he also displayed familiarity with him and invited him to dinner with him. The young man’s ignorance of the high regard he was thus given was such that he said, ‘I have eaten my dinner,’ as though, to him, eating with the Commander of the Faithful and sharing his meal had nothing to them but satisfying the pang of hunger. Such a person cannot be corrected by words alone, with no physical act.” The people remained silent and left.

Bakr ibn ʿAbd Allāh said, “The one most worthy of a slap is he who approaches food to which he has not been invited. The one most worthy of two slaps is he to whom the host says, ‘Sit here,’ and he says, ‘No, there.’ And the one most worthy of three slaps is he who has been invited to food and says to the host, ‘Invite the housewife to eat with us.’”

Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ said, “A chivalrous young man ought not to be *mukḥil* or *muqabbib* or *mukawḳib* or *shukāmid* or *ḥurāmid* or *nuqāmid*.” Then he explained the terms, saying, “As for the *mukḥil*, he is the one who extracts the marrow from a bone so closely as though it were an ivory *mukḥula* (kohl vial); the *muqabbib* is the one who piles up meat chunks in front of him making them like a *qubba* [a dome]; the *mukawḳib* is the one who spits out into the washbowl and expectorates into it until his spittle in it is like *kamāḳib* [stars]; the *ḥurāmid* is the one who comes at lunch or supper and asks, ‘What are you eating?’ and they say, ‘Poison,’ out of hatred for him, but he puts his hand to the food, saying, ‘[May my penis be] in the cunt of life’s mother after you are gone!’; and the *shukāmid* is the one who eats one mouthful after another before swallowing the preceding one, and so he chokes like a cock which has swallowed a mouse; and the *nuqāmid* is the one who puts food in front of him and eats from the food in front of another.”

It is good manners that the host should wash his hand before eating, and then say to his guests, "He who wishes, let him wash." When he washes [his hand] after eating, he should let them do that first and then he follows."

Good manners in the presence of kings

Learned men have said, "No ruler should be led [in prayer] when he is in power, and only by his permission should he be honored."

Ziyād said, "In the presence of the Commander of the Faithful, no greeting should be given to someone who comes in."

‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās came into the presence of Mu‘āwiya when Ziyād was with him. Mu‘āwiya welcomed him, made place for him to sit next to him, and engaged him in conversation while Ziyād remained silent. "How are you, Abū al-Mughīra?" Ibn ‘Abbās asked him. "It is as if you want to establish an alienation between you and us!" "No," Ziyād said, "but in the presence of the Commander of the Faithful, no greeting should be given to someone who comes in." Ibn ‘Abbās said, "What I have always known is that people greet their brethren in the presence of their Commanders." "Leave him alone, O Ibn ‘Abbās," Mu‘āwiya intervened, "for whenever you wish to win, you do win."

Al-Shaybānī said, "Ibn Marwān spat but his spittle did not go far enough and fell on the edge of the carpet. A man in the gathering rose and wiped it with his sleeve. Whereupon ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān said, "There are four persons one should not be ashamed of serving: the imam, the scholar, one's father, and the weak person."

Yaḥyā ibn Khālīd said, "Asking kings about their health is a greeting of the stupid. When you wish to ask, 'How is the prince this morning?' say, 'May God grant the prince blessing and honor this morning.' If the prince has been sick and you want to ask him about his health, say, 'May God bestow healing and mercy on the prince.'"

It was said, "When a king honors you more, magnify him even further; and if he makes a slave of you, make him a lord over you. Don't ever prolong your look at him, don't keep invoking God's blessing on him with every word you utter, don't turn against him when he is angry with you, don't be deluded when he is pleased with you, and don't pester him with requests."

It was also said, "Kings should not be asked questions; they should not be told, 'God bless you' when they sneeze; and they should not be required to explain 'How?' when they speak."

A poet said:

Kings should not be addressed first;
When bored, they should not be blamed;
When they speak, they should not be contradicted;
When they sneeze, they should not be told "God bless you!"
When they speak, they are not required to explain "How?"

They should be praised and respected.
Understand my advice and don't be a fool.

It was said, "Fully serving a king includes a servant's duty to bring him his shoes and not let him walk to them; he should place the right shoe opposite the king's right foot, and the left one opposite his left foot. If he sees a seat cushion needing to be propped up, he should not wait for the king's order to do that. He should examine the inkstand before the king commands him to do so, and he should dust it when he brings it to him; if he sees a piece of paper that has slipped out of his reach, he should bring it closer to him and place it in front of him as folded."

Friends of Mu'āwiya said to him, "Perhaps we have stayed sitting with you longer than you would like. You would prefer not to slight us by ordering us to leave, and we would prefer not to encumber you by staying too long. We wish you would give us a signal by which we would know that [is the case]." He said, "The signal is when I say, 'If you wish.'"

Something like that was asked of Yazīd ibn Mu'āwiya and he said, "When I say, 'With God's blessing.'"

Something like that was also asked of 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān and he said, "When I put down the cane."

And I have not heard of a more subtle idea, a more perfect courtesy, or a better way of asking kings [about their name] than that of Shabīb ibn Shayba, when he said to Abū Ja'far [al-Manṣūr], "May God give you prosperity. I would like to know [your name] but I deem you too exalted for my question." Abū Ja'far said, "I am So-and-So, the son of So-and-So."

A chapter on allusion and insinuation

One of the most beautiful and subtle allusions to an idea whose express wording would be ugly is in the following:

An abscess had grown under the testicles of 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz and he was asked, "Where on you has this abscess grown?" He answered, "Between the lowest part of the buttock and the scrotum."

Another man, who had an abscess grown in his armpit, was asked, "Where on you has this abscess grown?" He replied, "Under my shoulder."

God Most High has alluded to sexual intercourse by saying "touch" [*mulāmasa*] and to excrement by saying "privy" [*ghā'it*], and He said, "... or if any of you comes from the privy or you have touched women ..." [Q. 5:6] – *ghā'it* is a depression in the ground and its plural is *ghīṭān* – "And they said, 'What is the matter with this Messenger that he eats food ...'" [Q. 25:7], where He is alluding to defecation. The Most High has also said, "And clasp your hand to your armpit. It shall come forth white, without evil ..." [Q. 20:22] – He alluded to leprosy by saying evil.

Al-Rabiʿ ibn Ziyād called on al-Nuʿmān ibn al-Mundhir who had leprosy and asked him, “What is this whiteness on you?” Al-Nuʿmān answered, “It is God’s sword which He has polished.”

Ḥāritha ibn Badr entered the presence of Ziyād with a visible effect [of intoxication] on his face. Ziyād asked him, “What is this effect that I see on your face?” Ḥāritha replied, “I rode my roan mare, and it bolted and was unruly with me.” Ziyād remarked, “Now if you had ridden your gray one, it would not have done that.” By the roan mare, Ḥāritha was alluding to wine; and by the gray one, Ziyād was alluding to milk.

Muʿāwiya told al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays, “Explain to me the poet’s saying:

When a man of the tribe of Tamīm dies
And you’d like him to live, fetch some provision:
Bread or dates or cooking butter
Or the thing wrapped up in a striped robe;
And you’ll see him roaming the horizons, desiring
To get the head of Luqmān ibn ʿĀd.

“What is this ‘thing wrapped up in a striped robe?’” Al-Aḥnaf replied, “It is the *sakhīna*, O Commander of the Faithful.” Muʿāwiya said, “Tit for tat. And the one who begins is more unfair.”

The *sakhīna* is a dish which the people of Quraysh used to cook with a fine meal of hot pepper [*ḥarīra*] and they used to be vilified because of it; and about it, Ḥassān ibn Thābit said [using *Sakhīna* metonymically for the pagan tribe of Quraysh]:

Sakhīna claimed that they would defeat their Lord,
But they shall be defeated miserably by the victors.

And another poet said:

... They supped on their *ḥarīra* and so they slept.

When ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān deposed ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ from the governorship of Egypt and appointed Ibn Abi Sarḥ in his place, ʿAmr came to see ʿUthmān, wearing a padded jubbah, and the latter asked him, “What is padding your jubbah, ʿAmr?” “It is I,” ʿAmr replied. “I know that you are in it,” ʿUthmān said, then he added, “Have you noticed, ʿAmr, that she-camels have more abundant milk after you left [Egypt]?” ʿAmr rejoined, “That is because you have left their young hungry.” ʿUthmān alluded to Egypt’s [income from] taxes by referring to she-camels [with abundant milk] while ʿAmr, by referring to their young being hungry, alluded to the injustice of the governor succeeding him, who had deprived people of their stipends and provided the ruler with abundance.

There was a man in Medina named Jaʿda who combed his hair and let it hang long, and flaunted himself to the bondmaids. A man from the Ansar who

was out fighting in a campaign wrote to ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him:

O messenger, tell Abū Ḥafṣ [‘Umar] for me
That our young she-camels
Are being entrapped by a Ja‘d [stingy man] of a young male camel,
Who is an evil man for the few thoughtless young females.
I am a reliable source: may I be your redemption and may God guide you
While we are distracted from you in the time of siege.

He alluded to women by saying she-camels and hinted at a man named Ja‘da. ‘Umar asked about him and was directed to him, so he cut the man’s hair and exiled him from Medina.

During his circumambulation of the Ka‘ba, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb heard a woman saying:

Some of the women are given to drink fresh, chilled,
Pure water and so they become settled [in their homes];
And some of them are given to drink green, brackish,
Salty water. If it were not for the fear of God, they would have run away.

He understood her complaint and sent for her husband. He found him to have a foul-smelling mouth, so he gave him a choice either to take five hundred dirhams or to divorce her. He chose the money, so ‘Umar gave them to him, and the man divorced her.

One of the noble men of Basra called on Ziyād and the latter asked him, “Where in Basra do you live?” The man replied, “In the middle of it.” “How many children do you have?” asked Ziyād. “Nine,” the man replied. After he had left, Ziyād was told, “He has not been truthful concerning all you asked him. He lives on the edge of Basra and has only one son.” When the man called again, Ziyād asked him about that and the man replied, “I have not lied to you. I have nine sons, of whom I offered up eight, though they were mine; one remains with me and I don’t know whether he is for me or against me. My home lies between the city and the cemetery, and so I am between the living and the dead; therefore, my home is in the middle of Basra.” “You spoke truly,” Ziyād concluded.

Allusion used to conceal lying and unbelief

When al-Ḥajjāj defeated ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ash‘ath, killing [most of] his supporters and capturing some of them, ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān wrote to him to subject the captives to death by the sword: whoever of them admitted his unbelief would be set free, and whoever did not would be killed. Of the captives, ‘Āmir al-Sha‘bī, Muṭarrif ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Shikhkhīr, and Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr were brought before al-Ḥajjāj. Al-Sha‘bī and Muṭarrif resorted to insinuation

and allusion but did not clearly admit unbelief, so al-Ḥajjāj accepted their words and pardoned them; Saʿīd ibn Jubayr refused and so he was put to death.

The insinuation of al-Shaʿbī included the following: he said, “May God grant prosperity to the commander – our home was far, our hearts were open to error, we abandoned fear, we lay awake, and temptation got hold of us in which we were neither righteous and pious nor shamelessly iniquitous and strong.” Al-Ḥajjāj said, “He spoke truly. By God, they have not been righteous in rebelling against us, nor have they been strong. Set him free.” When Muṭarrif ibn ʿAbd Allāh was presented to al-Ḥajjāj, the latter asked him, “Do you admit your unbelief?” Muṭarrif answered, “Whoever breaks with the community, sheds blood, renounces his allegiance, and frightens the Muslims is worthy of having unbelief ascribed to him.” “Set him free,” al-Ḥajjāj said. Then Saʿīd ibn Jubayr was presented to him and he asked him, “Do you admit your unbelief?” Saʿīd replied, “I have not disbelieved in God since I first believed in Him.” “Cut off his head,” al-Ḥajjāj commanded.

When al-Wāthiq became caliph and appointed Aḥmad ibn Abī Duwād to the inquisition of people’s belief in the Qurʾān, the latter ordered jurists and theologians to be brought before him, among whom was al-Ḥārith ibn Miskīn who was told, “Testify that the Qurʾān is created.” He said, “I testify that the Torah, the Gospel, the Psalms, and the Qurʾān – these four are created.” Saying so, he stretched out his four fingers insinuating by them [that it is they that were created] while he was alluding to the creation of the Qurʾān, and so he saved himself from being killed. But Aḥmad ibn Naṣr, Baghdad’s theologian, could not find a suitable method of allusion and declined to use it, so he was killed by crucifixion.

A hermit once entered the presence of a caliph, and the latter invited him to eat with him. “Commander of the Faithful,” the hermit said, “the one who is fasting does not eat; and I am not justifying myself [by saying so], for it is rather God who justifies whomever He wishes.” In fact, the hermit only disliked the caliph’s food.

Ibn ʿIrbād and the Kharijites

Al-Aṣmaʿī said on the authority of ʿĪsā ibn ʿUmar, “While Ibn ʿIrbād was walking concealing his intention, he was met by Kharijites killing people with their swords. He asked them, ‘Have you come across anything when dealing with the Jews?’ ‘No,’ they replied. ‘Go, then,’ he said, ‘you are rightly guided.’ So they went away and left him [unhurt].”

The Devil of the Fort [Muḥammad ibn al-Nuʿman Abū Jaʿfar al-Aḥwal, the Shīʿite extremist in Ṭabaristān] met a Kharijite carrying a sword in his hand. “By God,” the Kharijite threatened, “I will kill you unless you declare yourself unaffiliated with ʿAlī.” He responded, “I am with ʿAlī and with ʿUthmān unaffiliated.” He meant that he was [an adherent] of ʿAlī, and unaffiliated with ʿUthmān.

Abū Bakr ibn Shayba said, “Speaking from the pulpit of Kufa, al-Walīd ibn ‘Uqba announced, ‘I call upon the person who called me hairy-chested to stand up.’ A man from Kufa stepped forward to him and said, ‘Now who will step forward before you and say: I am the one who called you hairy-chested?’ It was he who had called him that.”

Mu‘āwiya said to Ṣaṣa‘a ibn Ṣūḥān, “Go up on the pulpit and curse ‘Alī.” Ṣaṣa‘a refrained and said, “Will you exempt me from that?” “No,” Mu‘āwiya replied. So Ṣaṣa‘a ascended the pulpit, praised God and lauded Him, then said, “O ye people, Mu‘āwiya has commanded me to curse ‘Alī, so curse him – may God curse him.”

Concealing a lie by way of praise

Ibn al-Haytham and a drunken youth

Al-Mada‘īnī said, “A drunken youth was brought to al-‘Uryān ibn al-Haytham and the latter asked him, ‘Who are you?’ The youth replied:

I am the son of him whose cooking pot is never taken off [the fire],
And if it is ever taken off it will soon return.
You see people come in droves to the light of his fire,
Some of them stand by it and some sit down.

“So he thought the youth was the son of a nobleman and ordered that he be released. When an investigation was done, he was told that the youth was the son of a greengrocer.”

‘Īsā ibn Mūsā and Ibn Shubruma concerning a suspect

A man called on ‘Īsā ibn Mūsā when the judge Ibn Shubruma was with him. The judge, in whose court the man had been charged with a suspicious act, asked ‘Īsā, “Do you know this man?” ‘Īsā answered, “Yes, he has a house, footing, and stature.” So the judge let him go. When Ibn Shubruma left, ‘Īsā’s companions asked him, “Did you [really] know this man?” He answered, “No. But I knew he has a house in which he lodges, feet on which he walks, and stature meaning [the height at which are] his ears and shoulders.”

A man asked a woman’s people for her hand in marriage on behalf of another man. He was asked, “What is his profession?” “A trader in animals,” he answered. So they let him marry her. Their investigation later revealed that he sold cats and when they chided him for that, he said, “Are cats not animals? I have not lied to you at all.”

Mu‘allā al-Ṭā‘ī came to visit Ibn al-Sarī who was sick and said to him:

I swear that if God grants health
To *al-sarī* [the nobleman], son of al-Sarī, and he is healed,

I will set out on a pilgrimage on my camels for a month,
And – in gratitude – I will free Sālim and Ṣafāʾ.

When he left him, his friends said to him, “By God, we’ve never known that you have a slave [called] Sālim or a slave [called] Ṣafāʾ. Who then did you intend to free?” He said, “These are two cats of mine. Besides, pilgrimage is an obligatory duty and so I have nothing to lose because of what I said, if God Most High wills.”

A chapter on allusion and insinuation by way of joking

Ibn Sirīn was asked about a man and he answered, “He was taken away [by God] yesterday.” When he noticed the concern of the person who had asked him, he added, “God takes away the souls [of human beings] when they die; and of those who have not died, during their sleep.” [Q. 39:42] By ‘being taken away’ I meant sleep.”

Ziyād fell sick and Shurayḥ, the judge, went to visit him. After he had left, Masrūq ibn al-Ajdaʿ sent a word to him, asking, “In what condition have you left the prince?” He answered, “I left him commanding and prohibiting.” Masrūq said, “Shurayḥ is a man of difficult insinuations; ask him [to explain].” So they asked him and he answered, “I left him commanding others to execute [what was written in] his will, and prohibiting them from lamenting him.”

Sinān ibn Mukammil al-Numayrī was one day riding along, with ʿUmar ibn Hubayra al-Fazārī on his mule. Ibn Hubayra said to Sinān, “Lower the rein of your mule.” Sinān answered, “It is restrained, may God prosper the prince.”

Ibn Hubayra was referring to the saying of Jarīr:

Lower your eyes, for you are from Numayr.
You’ve reached neither the stature of Kaʿb nor of Kilāb.

And Sinān was referring to the poet who said:

Don’t ever trust a Fazārī, left alone
With your she-camel. Restrain it with belts.

[Fazārīs were reviled for their sexual relations with she-camels.]

A man from the tribe of Numayr passed by another from the tribe of Tamīm who carried a falcon on his hand. The Tamīmī man asked the Numayrī, “Is this your falcon?”

“Yes,” the Numayrī man said, “and it catches grouses.”

The Tamīmī man was referring to the saying of Jarīr:

I am the falcon looking down on the tribe of Numayr,
Foreordained to swooping down on them from the air.

And the Numayrī man was referring to the saying of al-Ṭirimmāḥ:

The tribe of Tamīm know the ways to meanness better than the grouses,
But if they [try to] follow the ways to noble deeds, they will be lost.

Ibn Yazīd al-Hilālī and a Muḥāribī

A man from the tribe of Muḥārib entered the presence of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yazīd al-Hilālī who was the governor of Armenia. Nearby was a creek with frogs in it. ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yazīd said, “The elders of Muḥārib did not let us sleep last night!” The man from Muḥārib said to him, “May God prosper the prince, do you know why that was?” “Why?” asked ‘Abd Allāh. The Muḥāribī man said, “Because they lost a veil [*burqu*] of theirs.” ‘Abd Allāh ibn Yazīd retorted, “May God consider you and what you said shameful!”

Ibn Yazīd was referring to the saying of al-Akḥṭal:

The elders of Muḥārib croak for no reason,
I don’t think they’re feathering or sharpening [their arrows].
They are frogs in the dark of night responding to one another,
And their noise directs to them the serpent of the sea.

And the Muḥāribī man was referring to the poet who says:

Every Hilālī man has a veil [*burqu*] of meanness,
And Ibn Yazīd has both a veil and a gown.

Mu‘āwiya said to ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ḥakam, “Describe to me these two horses.” So ‘Abd al-Raḥmān said, “One of them has a husky neigh and the other a thundering one.” He was referring to the saying of al-Najāshī:

Ibn Hind was saved by a fleet steed with a nimble run
And a husky and thundering neigh, when spears were nigh.

Mu‘āwiya said, “Indeed, but their owner does not flirt with his daughters-in-law.” ‘Abd al-Raḥmān had been accused more than once of flirting with his daughter-in-law.

Ziyād consulted one of his trusted men about a woman he wanted to marry. “She is not good for you,” the man said, “I have seen a man kiss her.” So Ziyād left her, but the man went to her and married her. When Ziyād heard the news, he sent for the man and asked him, “Have you not told me that you saw a man kiss her?” “Yes,” the man replied, “I saw her father kiss her.”

A bedouin Arab said to ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb [the caliph], “Carry me and Suḥaym on a camel.” ‘Umar said to him, “I beseech you by God, O bedouin, is this Suḥaym a skin receptacle [*ziqq*]?” “Yes,” the bedouin said, then added, “Whoever cannot benefit from his imagination [*ẓann*] cannot benefit from his reality [*yaqīn*].”

Bidding farewell to a man he hated, a man said, “Go with God’s hidden protection and with His veiled safeguard.” The man surmised the other man’s ill-intention and said, “May God raise your position, strengthen your back, and

make you gazed upon.” [The former man was wishing the latter God’s neglect of him, and the latter man was wishing the former that he be crucified – all in ostensibly polite language.]

Al-Shaybānī said, “Ibn Abī ‘Atīq was a man given to joking and diversion. His name was ‘Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad ibn Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, may God be pleased with them. His wife, who was one of the nobles of Quraysh, owned several girls who sang at weddings and funerals. She ordered one of them to sing verses that she herself had composed about her husband, so the slave-girl sang while he was listening:

May God take away what you have lived by,
For you have utterly subdued your mind
And spent your wealth unabashedly
On every sort of adulteress and on wine.

He asked the slave-girl, “Who composed these verses?” “My owner,” she replied. He took a piece of paper, wrote the verses on it, and took it away with him. On meeting ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb unexpectedly, he said to him, “Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, stop one moment, I would like to talk to you.” ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Umar stopped and Ibn Abī ‘Atīq asked him, “What do you think of someone who lampooned me with these verses?” And he recited the verses to him. ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Umar said, “I think you should pardon and forgive.” Ibn Abī ‘Atīq bristled, “By God, if I meet him, I shall screw him!” But Ibn ‘Umar rebuked and upbraided him, and said, “Shame on you!” A few days later, he met him [again]. Ibn ‘Umar turned away from him when he saw him but Ibn Abī ‘Atīq faced him and said, “I beg you by the tomb [of your father] and him who is buried in it to listen to a couple of words.” Ibn Abī ‘Atīq gave him his shoulder but listened to him say, “You know, Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, I met the person who composed those verses and I screwed him.” ‘Abd Allāh was stunned and stupefied. When Ibn Abī ‘Atīq noticed what had happened to him, he came close to his ear and whispered, “May God make you prosperous! She is my wife.” So Ibn ‘Umar rose and kissed him between his eyes.

A chapter on silence

Wiseman Luqmān used to sit with David, may God bless him and grant him peace, to learn from him. He was a black slave. One day Luqmān saw David making an iron shield and wondered at him, for he had never seen a shield. Luqmān did not ask him what he was making and David did not tell him, until the shield was completed after a year and David measured it against himself and said, “*Zird tāvā li-yōm qirāvā*,” which means “A strong shield for a day of fighting.” Luqmān said, “Silence is judicious but few are those who keep it.”

Abū ‘Abd Allāh, al-Mahdī’s secretary, said, “Be more eager to seek fortune by silence than to seek it by speaking, for misfortune is dependent on speech.”

Abū al-Dardā' said, "Treat your ears fairly in relation to your mouth. You have been given two ears and only one mouth so that you may listen more than you speak."

Ibn 'Awf said on the authority of al-Ḥasan, "People sat with Mu'āwiya and spoke while al-Aḥnaf remained silent. 'Why don't you speak, Abū Baḥr?' Mu'āwiya asked him. 'I am afraid of you if I tell the truth,' he answered, 'and I am afraid of God if I lie.'"

Al-Muhallab ibn Abī Ṣufra said, "Seeing that a man's mind has a merit over his tongue is preferable to me than seeing that his tongue has a merit over his mind."

Salīm ibn 'Abd al-Malik said, "The mind's merit over the tongue is an honorable virtue but the tongue's merit over the mind is a mean defect."

It was said, "He who is tight-minded has a loose tongue; and he who is voluble utters many worthless words; and he who is ill-natured has few friends."

Harim ibn Ḥayyān said, "A speaker [will always find himself] in one of two positions: if he shortens his speech neglectfully, he will be defeated; and if he elaborates profusely, he will err."

Shabīb ibn Shayba said, "Whoever hears a word [of insult] he dislikes and overlooks it will be spared its harm."

Aktham ibn Ṣayfī said, "The man's organ that leads to his death lies between his jaws."

Ja'far ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God be pleased with them, said:

A man dies from a slip of his tongue,
He does not die from a slip of his foot.
The slip from his mouth will do away with his head,
But the slip of his foot may heal slowly.

A poet said:

Forbearance is beauty and silence is safety.
So when you speak, don't be loquacious.
If I have regretted being silent once,
I have regretted often having spoken.

Al-Ḥasan ibn Hānī' said:

Leave a man alone who criticizes you
And walk away from him in peace.
Dying of the disease of silence is better
For you than dying of the disease of speech.
Many a single word has led
To the death of legions.
A safe person is indeed one who
Curbs his mouth with a bridle.

A wise man said, "My portion of silence belongs to me and its benefit is limited to me; but my portion of speech belongs to another [once uttered] and its evil consequences will rebound on me."

It was said, "If speaking appeals to you, be silent."

A man asked 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, "When should I speak?" and 'Umar replied, "When you desire to be silent." The man asked, "So when should I keep silent?" and 'Umar replied, "When you desire to speak."

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, "A human being was not given anything worse than fluency."

'Abd Allāh ibn al-Ahtam heard a man speaking and making mistakes, so he said, "With your speaking, silence has been endowed with love."

A chapter on speaking

Those who ascribed merit to speaking said, "Prophets have been sent with speech and not with silence. The merit of silence has been described by speech, but speech has not been described by silence. By speech, that which is good is commanded, and that which is evil is prohibited; and by speech, God is glorified and His praise is sung. [The ability to] elucidate through speech [*al-bayān*] is what God has bestowed on His servants, for He said, "He created man, taught him elucidation [*al-bayān*]." [Q. 55:2–3] All learning can be conveyed by nothing but tongues so that it may be contained in hearts. Thus, the benefit of speech is general to its speaker and its hearer, but the benefit of silence is limited to the one who keeps it."

The thing said about silence and speaking that is most just is the adage, "All speaking about good is better than silence, and all silence about evil is better than speaking."

'Abd Allāh ibn al-Mubārak, the author of *Al-Raqā'iq*, said elegizing Mālik ibn Anas al-Madanī:

He was taciturn, when silence was an embellishment,
But an inventor of virgin ideas that he unsealed.
He deeply knew all wisdom contained in the Qur'ān,
And belles-lettres were alive in his flesh and blood.

'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said, "Abandoning movement [including that of the tongue] is foolishness."

Bakr ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Muzanī said, "Silence is a speech impediment."

It was said, "Silence is sleep and speech, an awakening."

And it was said, "Everything that is folded becomes shorter except speech, for it becomes longer whenever it is folded."

A poet said:

Silence is his natural disposition and
When he speaks, his speech is decisive.

He keeps silent, but when he speaks
He leaves no room for additional words.

A chapter on eloquence

Muḥammad ibn Sīrīn said, “I have seen nothing in a woman more beautiful than plumpness, and I have seen nothing in a man more beautiful than eloquence.”

God, may He be blessed and exalted, said among other things He related as said by His prophet Moses, may God bless him and grant him peace, concerning his desolation for his lack of eloquence, “And my brother Aaron is more eloquent than I. Send him therefore with me as a helper to confirm that I speak truly.” [Q. 28:34]

Evils of speech

Ibn al-Sammāk spoke one day while a slave girl of his was listening. When he entered he asked her, “What do you think of my speech that you heard?” “How beautiful,” she said, “except that you keep repeating it.” “I keep repeating,” he said, “so that whoever did not understand it may understand it.” She said, “By the time it is understood by the one who did not understand it, the one who understood it will be bored.”

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, “Muʿāwiya [the caliph] once asked those sitting with him, ‘Who are the most eloquent people?’ A man from the guests sharing the meal said, ‘They are the people who rise above the *rutta* [hesitation as a speech defect] of Iraq, who avoid the *kashkasha* [pronouncing the pronominal suffix *k* as *ksh*] of [the] Bakr [tribe], who shirk the *shanshana* [pronouncing *every k* as *sh*] of Taghlib, who don’t have the *ghamghama* [mumbling] of Qudāʿa nor the *ṭumṭumāniyya* [pronouncing the definite article *al* as *am*] of Ḥimyar.’ Muʿāwiya asked, ‘Who would they be?’ The man replied, ‘Your own people [of the] Quraysh [tribe], O Commander of the Faithful.’ Muʿāwiya said, ‘You have spoke truly. Who are you?’ The man said, ‘A man from [the tribe of] Jarm.’” Al-Aṣmaʿī added, “Jarm are the most eloquent people.”

This account was mentioned in the section on Quraysh’s excellent qualities, but this is also its place so we have mentioned it [again].

Abū al-ʿAbbās Muḥammad ibn Yazīd, the grammarian, said, “*Tamtama* in speech is a stutter in pronouncing the *t*. An *ʿuqla* is a tongue twisting when intending to speak. A *ḥubsa* is the inability to articulate anything when intending to speak. *Lafaf* is mixing one letter with another. *Rutta* like *rataj* is difficulty at the beginning of speaking, but when some words are said, the rest follows. *Ghamghama* is hearing the sound of words without the clarity of the individual letters. *Rutta* is instinctive (*gharizī*), as a *rajaz* poet said:

O you who mix things up and are *aratt* [hesitant].

And it is said to be prevalent among the nobility. As for *ghamghama*, it may be in speech as well as in other matters, for it is the sound of someone whose articulation of letters is not understood.

‘Antara said:

Many a friend have I called out to, but he mumbled
Intending to say “Here I am” but he did not speak;
He became dumb because of his fear of talking.

Tamṭama is the resemblance of [Arabic] speech to Persian. A *lukna* is an intrusion of Persian language when speaking [Arabic] – we shall explain this in detail, and we shall state what has been said in this regard, if God wills. A *luthgha* is [a lisp] exchanging one letter for another. A *ghunna* is imbuing a letter with a nasal sound. A *khunna* is a more excessive nasalization. *Tarkhim* is omitting [the last letter of] words. *Faʿfaʿa* is a stutter in pronouncing the *f*; it is said: a man is *faʿfaʿ* (stutterer) – on the pattern of *fāʿāl* [correction: *faʿlāl*], and similar to it is *sābāt* and *khātām*. A *rajaʿ* poet said:

O Mayy, whose stocking is torn,
You took my *khātām* [that is, *khātām* = ring] unrightfully.

Another poet said:

He is not a *faʿfaʿ* or a *tamtām* [stuttering in pronouncing *f* or *t*],
Nor does he like worthless talk.

With regard to the *kashkasha* of Tamīm, when the tribe of ‘Amr ibn Tamīm pronounce the feminine pronominal suffix *k* with a pause, they exchange it for an *sh* sound because of the nearness of the *sh* and the *k* in articulation. Their *rajaʿ* poet said:

Will you derive benefit – I will make you benefit – [*anfaʿash*, not *anfaʿak(i)*]
And will you insert what I have into what you have? [*maʿash*, not *maʿak(i)*]

With regard to the *kaskasa* of Bakr, some of them exchange the *k* for an *s* just as the Tamīmites exchange it for a *sh*. ‘Antara says about the *ṭumṭumāniyya* of Ḥimyar:

Young ostriches seek shelter in it as do
Yemenite clouds in dumb, incomprehensible [thunder].

Ṣuhayb Abū Yaḥyā, may God have mercy on him, used to speak [Arabic] with a Byzantine accent.

God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “Ṣuhayb is a forerunner of the Byzantines.”

‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād used to speak [Arabic] with a Persian accent acquired from his mother’s husband, Shīrawayhi al-Aswārī.

Ziyād al-Aʿjam, who was from the tribe of ʿAbd al-Qays, used to speak [Arabic] with a Persian accent. He recited verses in praise of al-Muhallab, saying:

He is a man whom the *sultān* [ruler] made more desirous of praise,
When the *sultān* [is known] to change his friends often.

He means *sulṭān*. That is because the *t* and the *ṭ* are close in articulation.

As for the *ghunna*, it is thought to be nice in a young slave girl. Ibn al-Raqqāʿ said the following about a deer:

She drives a deer with a twang, whose pointed horn
Is like a pen dipped in the ink of an inkwell.

Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ said, “When the tongue is constantly used [in speech], it becomes more supple and pliable.”

Al-ʿAttābī said, “If the tongue is held back from use [in speech], the articulation of letters becomes difficult for it.”

A *rajaʿ* poet said:

It is as though he has a mix-up [in his letters] when he speaks,
Because of long restraint [from speech], worry, and insomnia.

A chapter on desinential inflection and solecism

Abū ʿUbayda said, “Al-Shaʿbī passed by a group of non-Arab clients discussing grammar and he said to them, ‘Although you were able to put it in order, you have indeed been the first people to corrupt it.’”

Abū ʿUbayda said, “I wish he had heard the solecism [*lahn*] of Ṣafwān, Khālīd ibn Ṣafwān, Khāqān, al-Faṭḥ ibn Khāqān, and al-Walīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik.”

ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān said, “Solecism in speech is uglier than an unstitching in a garment and smallpox in a face.”

He was told, “Gray hair has come to you prematurely, O Commander of the Faithful.” He said, “What caused my hair to turn gray was speaking from the pulpits and fearing grammatical errors [*al-lahn*].”

Al-Ḥajjāj said to Ibn Yaʿmar, “Do you ever hear me make grammatical errors?” “No,” Ibn Yaʿmar said, “but perhaps your tongue gets ahead of you [and allows you] to [make] a few from time to time.” “When that happens,” al-Ḥajjāj said, “let me know.”

Al-Maʾmūn said to Abū ʿAlī, known as Abū Yaʿlā al-Minqarī, “I heard that you are illiterate, that you do not correctly recite poetry, and that you make grammatical errors in your speech.” “Commander of the Faithful,” Abū ʿAlī said, “As for grammatical errors, perhaps my tongue occasionally gets ahead of me to some; as for illiteracy and breaking [the prosodic and grammatical rules of] poetry, the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, was illiterate and used not to recite poetry.” Al-Maʾmūn said, “I have asked you about three

defects in you, and you have now added a fourth, namely, ignorance. You ignorant man: in the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, that was a virtue; but in you and your ilk, it is a deficiency. The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, refrained from that in order to allay suspicion from him, not because there is any fault with poetry and books. God, most blessed and exalted, said, ‘You did not recite any book before it, nor did you write one with your right hand; for then, those who follow falsehood would have doubted.’” [Q. 29:48]

‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān said, “Using desinential inflection [*al-i‘rāb*] is an embellishment to a lowly person and solecisms [*al-laḥn*] are a shortcoming in a nobleman.”

He also said, “Learn grammar as you learn the [religious] traditions and obligatory duties.”

A man said to al-Ḥasan, “We have a prayer leader who makes grammatical errors.” He answered, “Remove him.”

A poet said:

Grammar sets right the tongue of someone who speaks incorrectly,
And you respect a man who does not make grammatical errors.
If you seek to possess the most sublime of disciplines,
The most sublime of them is the one which sets tongues right.

Another poet said:

Grammar is difficult and its ladder is long:
If someone who does not know it tries to climb it,
His foot will slip and bring him down to the ground—
Wanting to make it inflectionally correct, he makes it unintelligible.

A man said to al-Ḥasan, “O Abū Sa‘īd.” Al-Ḥasan said to him, “I think that money distracted you from saying [correctly], ‘O Abā Sa‘īd.’”

‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was sitting with [Caliph] al-Walid ibn ‘Abd al-Malik, who was known to make many grammatical errors. ‘Umar called out, “Boy, call Ṣāliḥ to me.” The boy called out [wrongly], “O Ṣāliḥ^{an}.” Al-Walid corrected him, saying, “Delete [the accusative ending]^{an} [from Ṣāliḥ].” ‘Umar said, “And you, O Commander of the Faithful, add ^{an} [to Ṣāliḥ].”

A nobleman from Quraysh went to see al-Walid ibn ‘Abd al-Malik. [Wanting to ask him who was his father-in-law,] al-Walid [wrongly] said, “*Man khatanaka?*” [(“Who circumcised you?”) instead of “*Man khatanuka?*”] So the nobleman said, “So-and-So, the Jew.” “What are you saying? Woe to you!” al-Walid said. The nobleman said, “Perhaps you are asking about my father-in-law, O Commander of the Faithful. He is So-and-So, the son of So-and-So.”

‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān said, “Our love for al-Walid harmed us [when teaching him Arabic], for we did not make him live in the desert [to learn correct Arabic from the bedouin Arabs].”

Desinential declension may be considered too weighty [for use] in certain circumstances, and solecism may be deemed light in certain others.

Mālik ibn Asmā' ibn Khārīja al-Fazārī said:

He has a clever manner of speaking and sometimes makes
Grammatical errors; the best speech is one with [a few] solecisms.

That is because whoever tells a joke and wants to give its words their full share of desinential declension will destroy its beauty and make it lose its efficacy. Don't you see [this in the story of] Muzabbid al-Madīnī? He once overate and suffered from indigestion. He was told, "Why don't you vomit?" He said, "What shall I vomit? It is pure bread and tender meat. I will divorce my wife [the colloquial form *maratī* instead of *imraʿatī*] – if I find such vomit, I will eat it!"

Likewise, grammatical correctness is deemed ugly in inappropriate circumstances, as it was so deemed when ʿIsā ibn ʿUmar said while Ibn Hubayra was whipping him [because of things entrusted to him he denied], "By God, they were only *uthayyāb* [little robes] in *usayfāt* [little baskets] which your tithe collectors have confiscated."

A story is told about one of those whose grammatical errors were excessive. He had a slave-girl who sang to him the following:

If I ever hear someone blame her, I reject it;
It enters into one ear and goes out of [*min*] the other [*ukhrā*].

He said to her, "Say: out of the other [*ukhrī*], you harlot. Haven't I taught you that *min* [out of] is a preposition and is followed by a genitive case?"

A man said to Shurayḥ, "What do you say about a man whose father died and left behind his father [*abāhu*] and his brother [*akhihi*]?" Shurayḥ corrected him, "Say: his father [*abāhu*] and his brother [*akhāhu*]." The man continued, "How much [inheritance goes] to his father [*li-abāhu*] and to his brother [*li-akhāhu*]?" Shurayḥ corrected him again, "Say: to his father [*li-abihi*] and to his brother [*li-akhihi*]." The man said, "You are the one who taught me, so what can I do?"

When a man, named Ḥafṣ, who affected mastery of language and had a squint in his eyes and a disfigurement in his face caught a solecism in a poet's verse, the poet said of him:

Your eyes, O Ḥafṣ, and your nose resembling a mountain
Should have preoccupied you from pursuing what you pursue.
You pursue grammatical errors in embellished poetry
While all your physical appearance is built on errors.
Your eyes are unrhymed, your nose is dissonant,
Your face has defective repetitions: there is no place in you to patch.

A chapter on solecism and diacritical errors

Abū Ḥanīfa

Abū Ḥanīfa was prone to solecisms, but in matters of formal legal opinion and subtle ideas he was unequaled in his time.

A man asked him one day, “What do you think of a man who took a rock, hit a man’s head with it, and killed him? Do you consider this a cause for retaliation?” “No,” Abū Ḥanīfa replied, “even if he hit him with Abā Qubays.” [When naming this mountain, he wrongly said Abā Qubays in the accusative case, instead of Abi Qubays in the genitive or prepositional case following “with”.]

Bishr al-Marīsī was saying to those sitting with him, “God has satisfied your needs in the best manner and in the happiest,” [*ahna’uhā*: wrong nominative case, instead of *ahna’ihā* in the genitive case] when Qāsim al-Tammār heard some people laughing, so he said, “This is similar to what a poet said:

Even though God protected her, Sulaymā
Was stingy with something of which she was not deprived.”

Bishr al-Marīsī was a leader in matters of [legal] opinion, and Qāsim al-Tammār was a foremost authority among theologians, but his poetic citation in support of Bishr was stranger than Bishr’s grammatical error.

Shabīb ibn Shayba went to Ishāq ibn ʿIsā [in Basra] to offer his condolences over a child he had lost. He said, among other things, “May God prosper the prince, a child remains *muḥbanẓī* at the gate of Paradise and says, ‘I will not enter until my parents do.’” Ishāq ibn ʿIsā commented, “God be praised! What have you come by? The correct word is rather *muḥbanṭī* [refraining]. Have you not heard the *rajaz* poet who said:

When I recite poetry, I am not *muḥbanṭī*,
Nor am I fond of stretching [my words] too much.”

Shabīb said, “Is such a thing said to me, when there is no one more knowledgeable than me between the city’s two black-stone districts [*lābatayhā*]?!” Ishāq responded, “And this is another error: Does Basra have two *lāba* districts, O silly man?” By rebuking him, Ishāq showed him that he was wrong and shamed him, and Shabīb fell silent.

Explanation: *al-muḥbanṭī* is a person who refrains from doing something while wanting to do it; he does not refrain out of pride. It is pronounced with a *ṭ* and not with a *ẓ* as Shabīb pronounced it. When he said, “between the city’s two black-stone districts (*lābatayhā*)”, he was wrong because Basra does not have two *lāba* [lava] districts; only Medina and Kufa have *lāba* districts. A *lāba* is a *ḥarra*: a land with black stones.

Rare words

Fresh water is said to be *nuqākh* water and *furāt* water, when it is the freshest of fresh water. Water is *quʿāʿ* when it is extremely salty, and *hurāq* when its saltiness burns. It is *sharūb* when it is a little less than fresh, and *masūs* when it is less fresh than *sharūb*. Water is said to be *sharīb* when it is less than fresh [*ʿadhb*].

Al-Mufaḍḍal al-Ḍabbī met with ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Qurayb al-Aṣmaʿī, and the former recited:

She silences a young [*jadhaʿ*] donkey with [a drink of] water ...

Al-Aṣmaʿī corrected him, saying, "... a badly nourished [*jadiʿ*] donkey." Al-Mufaḍḍal fulminated in excessive anger but al-Aṣmaʿī said to him, "Even if you blow a trumpet, it will not be of use to you. Speak in the [soft] language of ants and be correct."

Marwān ibn Abī Ḥaḥṣa said the following verses concerning a group of poetry transmitters who did not know what poetry was despite their abundant transmission of it:

Like camels of burden, they carry poems and have no knowledge
Of good poetry except as camels do.
When a camel goes out in the morning with its burdens
Or returns in the evening, [I swear] by your life it does not know what is in
the sacks.

A chapter on rarities in grammar

Al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad said, "An Arab bedouin recited the following to me:

This Kilāb consists of ten clans
And you are innocent of its ten tribes.

"I began to wonder about his saying, 'ten clans.' When he noticed my wondering, he said, 'Is it not like the saying of another poet:

Acting like a shield protecting me from the one I feared
Were three persons: two buxom girls and one lass.'"

Abū Zayd said, "I asked al-Khalīl, 'Why do Arabs say *umayṣil* as a diminutive of *māṣil*, and not *wumayṣil*?' He replied, 'They did not wish their speech to resemble the barking of dogs.'"

Abū al-Aswad al-Duʿālī said, "Some Arabs say *lawlā-ya* [instead of *lawlā anā*] (if it were not for me) such-and-such would have happened."

A poet said:

If it were not for me [*lawlā-ya*], you would have fallen as many a domicile
Has tumbled with its bodies from the peak of the mountain.

Similarly, it is said *lawlā antum* and *lawlā-kum* (if it were not for you), both pronouns being the subject of a nominal sentence whose predicate is omitted and understood.

Abū Zayd said, “*Warā* and *quddām* [*behind* and *before*] are diptotes because they are feminine. The diminutive of *quddām* is *qudaydima*, and the diminutive of *warā* is *murayʿa*. *Quddām* in Arabic consists of five letters, because the *d* is doubled, so the *ā* has been deleted as otiose, lest the diminutive [of *quddām*] be formed according to the rule for words having five letters.

Abū Ḥātim said, “It is said, *Umm bayyinat al-umūma* and ‘*Amm bayyin al-umūma*’ [‘A mother of clear motherhood’ and ‘An uncle of clear unclehood’]. It is also said *maʿmūm* of a man when his skull [*umm raʿsih*] is wounded; and he is *mamūm* when he is afflicted with *mūm* [fever].”

Al-Māzinī said, “It is said, ‘In a man’s lineage there is an *urfa* [a knot], a *maṣma* [blemish], and an *ubna* [blot]; these qualities are also said of a stick if it has faults.’”

It is said, “His eye *qadhiyat* [has a mote] when it is sore with inflammation.”

Regarding advancing or delaying words in sentence structure, the following verse of a poet may be an example:

On the worse of her two days and the more disgraceful to her,
Hind rode in a howdah a camel.

He means: Hind rode a camel in a howdah on the worse of her two days; *sharra* [worse] is in the accusative case in Arabic because it is adverbial.

A thing may be named by the thing next to it, as in the verse of al-Farazdaq:

We obstructed heaven’s horizons to you:
Ours are its two moons and rising stars.

He says, “its two moons,” meaning the sun and the moon.

Similar is the people’s saying, “The two ‘Umars,” meaning Abū Bakr and ‘Umar [ibn al-Khaṭṭāb].

Al-Riyāshī said, “It is said, ‘He took away her *quḍḍa* and her *kuʿba*,’ if he took away her virginity (if he deflowered her).”

Abū ‘Ubayda said, “A man is *maʿyūn* when he can be physically seen by the ‘*ayn* [eye] but has no good deeds or sense to be reported [*makhbar*]. He is said to be *maʿīn* when he is afflicted in the eye; *maʿīn* is also a visible spring of water.”

Abū ‘Ubayda said, “I heard Ruʿba say, ‘I am *rayyiq*,’ meaning ‘*alā al-rīq* [with an empty stomach before breakfast].”

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, “Abū ‘Amr ibn al-‘Alā’ encountered ʿĪsā ibn ‘Umar, so he asked him, ‘How is your mount?’ and ʿĪsā replied, ‘It only increases in being well.’ Abū ‘Amr asked, ‘What are these *maʿyūrā* that run?’ He meant, ‘What are these donkeys [*ʿayr*] you are riding?’”

It is said: *maʿyūrā* [donkeys], *mashyūkhā* [sheiks], and *maʿbūdā* [slaves].

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, “It is [literally] said, ‘Read a peace greeting to him’” [to mean: Extend a peace greeting to him]. And he recited:

Read [that is, extend] a farewell greeting to my youth,
But if you find dalliance, let me have some.

Al-Farazdaq said:

The Qaysī man did not become lustful out of mental weakness,
But Khālīd’s foreskin floated *ʿal-māʾi*.

[By *ʿal-māʾi*] he meant *ʿalā al-māʾi* [on the water] but he omitted some letters, and this is at the end of Sibawayhi’s book.

A bookseller said:

O Ḥammād, I have seen rabbits [*arāniban* instead of *arāniba*, as a diptote]
Being caught by hand in hunting.
Grammarians have a disposition
Known for cunning and ruse.
ʿAbd Allāh beats Zayd [their usual example for subject and object]:
What does ʿAbd Allāh want from Zayd?

Abū Zayd al-Anṣārī recited the following verses:

O [tribe of] Qurṭ [grandson] of Ḥuyayy – may your father perish—
O [tribe of] Qurṭ, I am afraid for you and wary.
You said to him, “Lampoon Tamīm” – may your father perish
And may earth and stone fill the mouth of the one who said this.
The house of Tamīm which [*dhū*] you heard of
Is a house in which Muḍar reached the acme of its power.

Dhū here is in place of *alladhī* [which] and is invariable in all cases of inflection; this is a dialect of the tribe of Ṭayyī, who use *dhū* in place of *alladhī*.

Al-Ḥasan ibn Hanīʿ said:

The love of wine, which [*dhū*] you heard of,
Has not left me a remnant for loving anything else.

Some Arabs say, *lā abā-ka* in place of *lā abā laka* [May your father perish, or literally, May you have no father]. In the latter usage, the *ā* was left long and was not shortened, for if it were not inflected you would have said, *Lā aba laka* without the long *ā*. In the rules of the construct phrase, there is nothing resembling this because the *ā* separates the first member of the construct phrase from the second.

A poet said:

Do you threaten me with death, which I will
Inevitably meet? – may your father perish!

Another poet said:

Shammākh died and so did Muzarrid [his brother].
What nobleman is eternal? – may your father perish.

Al-Farrāʾ recited the following by Ibn Mālīk al-ʿUqaylī:

If I am not given trust over you and am only
To meet you *min warāʾu warāʾu* [behind the scenes].

This is like their saying: *bayna bayna* [a mixture, a combination].

Maḥmūd al-Warrāq said:

Shunning [their lover] was mixed with reunion;
The matter for them was *bayna bayna* [a mixture].

Al-Farazdaq said:

Whenever men saw Yazīd, they were seen to be
With necks subdued and eyes lowered [*namākis*].

Abū al-ʿAbbās Muḥammad ibn Yazīd, the grammarian, said, “In this verse, there is a point the grammarians find elegant. It is the fact that the poet gave the plural of *fāʿil* as *fawāʿil*, and so there is no difference between masculine and feminine; for you say *ḍāribā^{-tun}* [hitter] in the singular and *ḍawārib^{-u}* [hitters] in the plural. This plural form of *fawāʿil* is used in the masculine exclusively in two words: *fawāris* [horsemen] and *hawālik* [doomed to perdition]. But the poet was obliged by the meter of the verse to use it [that is, *namākis*] contrary to the normal usage; if it were not for necessity, he would not be permitted to do that.

Abū Rafīʿ ibn Salama, Abū ʿUbayda’s student known as Damādh, said the following verses addressed to Abū ʿUthmān al-Māzinī, the grammarian:

I reflected on grammar until I was bored,
And I exhausted soul and body for its sake.
And I wearied Bakr and his friends
With long questions on every subject.
Yet there is a chapter in it on the *fāʾ*—
May it be extinct – I wish it did not exist.
I became knowledgeable about its outer facts
And was clever enough to master its inner realities.
Next to it is a chapter on the *wāw*
That is as hateful, and the best of it is accursed.
If I say: Tell me, why is it said,
Lastu bi-ātika aw taʿtiyanna
(I am not coming to you until you come [to me])?
Answer me: Why is this said so [with *taʿtiya*]
In the subjunctive? They say: Because *an* is understood.
But I don’t see that *an* has a place here

So that I may know [the rule of] what is only said with *an*.
 Because I think so long about the problem of *an*,
 O Bakr, I am afraid that I'll go mad.

A chapter on uncommon and pedantic words

Abū 'Alqama called on A'yan, the physician, and said, "May God give you prosperity. I ate of the meat of these *jawāzil* [young pigeons] and I suffered from *taṣ'a* [indigestion]. I felt a pain between the *wābila* [upper arm] and the *da'ya* [vertebrae] of the neck. It continued to grow and expand until it reached the *khilb* [diaphragm] and the *sharāsif* [lower ribs]. Do you have a medication?" The physician said, "Yes. Take some *kharbaq*, *salfaq*, and *shibriq* [drugs], and *zahziq* [shake] them as a mother makes her baby dance, then wash them in *dhawb* [honey] and drink them." Abū 'Alqama said, "I have not understood you." A'yan commented, "I only made you understand what you made me understand."

On another occasion, he said to him, "I feel some *ma'ma'a* and some *qarqara* [a rumbling noise in the stomach]." The physician said, "As for the *ma'ma'a*, I don't know what it is; but as for the *qarqara*, it is some farting that is not yet ripe."

Abū al-Aswad al-Du'ali asked Abū 'Alqama, "How is your son?" He replied, "He has been afflicted with a fever which fully *ṭabakhat* [cooked] him, utterly *raḍakhat* [broke] him, completely *fatakhat* [weakened] him, and made him like a *farkh* [chick]." Abū al-Aswad asked him, "And what did his wife do, who used to *tushārr* [dispute] with him, *tuhārr* [growl] at him, *tumārr* [wrangle] with him, and *tuzārr* [bite] him?" He said, "He divorced her, so she married another man and *haḍiyat* [was happy] and *baḍiyat*." Abū al-Aswad asked, "What is the meaning of *baḍiyat*?" Abū 'Alqama replied, "It is an uncommon word that has not reached you." Abū al-Aswad commented, "My dear nephew, every word that your uncle does not know – you better hide it as a cat hides its excrement."

Abū 'Alqama and a cupper

Abū 'Alqama asked a cupper to cup him and said, "Clean the cups well, tighten the bars of the vises, sharpen the edges of the scalpels, place [the cups] fast, and remove them quickly; let your incision be a prick, and your sucking a rapid seizing; don't reject anyone who comes to you, and don't force anyone who refuses [to be cupped]." The cupper put his cups in his leather-lined basket and left him.

Abū al-Maknūn and an Arab bedouin

An Arab bedouin heard Abū al-Maknūn, the grammarian, say in his circle the following prayer for rain, "O God, our Lord, our God, and our Master: Bless Muḥammad, our Prophet. Whoever wishes to harm us, O God, let that harm

encircle him as necklaces encircle the necks of newborn girls; then let that harm be firmly established on his head as the stones of baked clay were firmly established on the owners of the Elephant. O God, give us rainwater to drink, to help us, to grant us health; and let it be plentiful, thundering, gushing, noisy, drizzling, outpouring, widespread, generous, and with heavy clouds; and let it be good to our people in general and not harmful to our elite.” The Arab bedouin said, “Successor of Noah, this is the Flood, by the Lord of the Ka’ba. Let me first take refuge in a mountain that will protect me from the water.”

On another occasion, he heard him say the following on a cold day, “This day is wet and severe; it is a chilly and long, useless day.” The Arab bedouin shivered and said, “By God, this [language] makes me colder.”

Abū Bakr al-Mankūr gave a sermon in which he used uncommon pedantic words, while a man from Kufa called Ḥanash was at the foot of the pulpit. The man turned to another next to him and said, “I hate a preacher who is [over-]eloquent and uses grandiloquent, pedantic words.” Abū Bakr al-Mankūr, the preacher, heard him and said to him, “How needy you are, O Ḥanash, of a well-twisted whip with a pliable leather strip and a great tip, by which you will be lashed from the bottom of your neck to the base of your buttocks, so that you will rise and amply dance with it without merriment.”

Ḥabīb al-Ṭā’ī said:

You have no control over uncommon words,
But your use of them is strange and odd.
If your ignorance [of them] were to turn into knowledge,
You would then be well-established in the science of the Unknown.

Here is some of what we have said in praise of a man who used simple words and beautiful language:

It is speech whose matchless words are like
Magic to the mind of an intelligent man.
Neither does it feel disgusting to the tongue
Nor exceptional and abnormal to the heart.
It does not go overboard by using repugnant vocabulary
And it does not go wild by using uncommon words.
It is a sword, the like of which you should carry
When cutlass clashes with cutlass:
With one heads are cut off and
With the other disasters are curtailed.

A chapter on charging a man with what is not in his nature

It has been said that jurisprudence [*al-fiqh*] is not [attained] by affecting to be a jurisprudent, and eloquence [*al-faṣāḥa*] is not [attained] by pretending to be eloquent; for a person does not become verbose unless he feels some inadequacy

in himself. Among what Arabs and Persians have agreed upon is the saying, “A natural disposition [*al-ṭabʿ*] is more powerful [than affectation].”

Ḥafṣ ibn al-Nuʿmān said, “A man makes himself; but when you test him, he is inclined to his root.”

Al-ʿArjī said:

O you, who are qualified by what is not your nature [*shima*]
And some of whose characteristics are change and flattery,
Return to your nature [*khīm*] whose quality is known;
For affectation fails reaching up to natural disposition.

Another poet said:

Whoever creates what is not natural [*khīm*] for him
Will lose it, and he will be overcome by his own nature.

Another poet said:

Every man will one day return to his natural disposition [*shima*],
Although he may have affected certain characteristics for a time.

Al-Khuraymī said:

A generous man is [sometimes] blamed for his generosity.
Can the sea be capable of not flowing?

Another poet said:

A woman blamed you for being generous, O man of bounty,
So I said to her, “Does slandering blame diminish the sea?”
She wanted to restrain your bounty from the habit of liberality,
But who can ever restrain the clouds from raining?

Ḥabīb said:

He is so accustomed to having an open hand that if
He closes it to receive something, his fingers will not respond.

Another poet said:

Their fingers have been shriveled by being closed,
So if they tried to open them, they would break.

It was narrated that a king of Persia had an experienced, resolute minister and that he acted on his ideas and achieved prosperity with his advice. When the king died, he was succeeded by a son of his who was conceited and opinionated; so he did not give that minister his due position and did not accept his opinions and advice. He was told, “Your father did not decide anything without him.” He said, “He was mistaken and I myself will test him.” He then sent for the

minister and asked him, “What has more influence on a man, breeding [*al-adab*] or nature [*al-ṭabīʿa*]?” The minister said, “Nature is more influential because it is the root and breeding is a branch, and every branch returns to its root.” The king then ordered that his dining table be set; and when it was, cats came in carrying candles and stood around the table. The king said to the minister, “Think of your error and the weakness of your belief. When was these cats’ father a candle maker?” The minister kept silent, and then said, “Give me some time before I answer you tomorrow night.” The king said, “That time is given to you.” The minister went out, called a servant of his, and said to him, “Look for a mouse, tie it with a string, and bring it to me.” So the servant did and the minister put the mouse in a pouch that he concealed in his sleeve. On the following day, he went to the king; and when the dining table was set, the cats came in with the candles and surrounded it. The minister untied the mouse, took it out of his pouch, and threw it to them. The cats cast the candles away and raced to the mouse in such a hurry that the house was about to burn down on its people. The minister said [to the king], “What do you now think of the influence of nature over breeding, and the return of the branch to its root?” The king said, “You are right.” And he restored the relationship that had existed between his father and the minister. The crucial factor in every thing is its nature, and affectation is blameworthy.

God said to His Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, “Say, O Muḥammad, ‘I am not of those who are given to affectation.’” [Q. 38:86]

It was said, “Whosoever assumes a characteristic that is not his own by nature will be seized by his custom and returned to his nature, just as water returns to its natural coldness if you leave it for an hour after heating it, and just as a bitter tree produces a bitter fruit even if you daub it with honey.”

A chapter on avoiding argument and contention

Al-Sāʿib ibn Ṣayfī went to the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, and asked him, “Do you know me, O Messenger of God?” The Prophet replied, “How would I not know my friend in the Jāhiliyya period who used not to argue or contend [with anyone]?”

Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ said, “Argument and contention spoil old friendships and break strong bonds. The least harmful [thing] in them is that they are a means to competition and strife.”

ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Laylā said, “Don’t contend with your brother, for you will either anger him or lie to him.”

A poet said:

Beware of contention, for it leads
To vilification and a break in relationships.

‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās said, “Don’t contend with a jurist or a fool, for the jurist will overcome you and the fool will harm you.”

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “To revile a believer is an iniquity, and to fight him is an act of unbelief.”

A chapter on misbehavior [*sū’ al-adab*]

‘Urwa ibn Mas‘ūd al-Thaqafi went to the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, and began conversing with him and gesticulating with his hand so close to him that it touched his beard. Al-Mughīra ibn Shu‘ba was standing at the head of God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, and he had a sword in his hand. “Hold your hand away from the beard of God’s Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace,” al-Mughīra warned, “lest it should not return to you!” And so, ‘Urwa held his hand away.

This ‘Urwa was the “great man of the two towns” about whom the tribe of Quraysh is quoted [in the Qur’ān] as saying, “Why has this Qur’ān not been sent down to some great man of the two towns?” [Q. 43:31] It is also said that he rather was al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīra al-Makhzūmī.

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, and Tamīm’s delegation

When Tamīm’s delegation came to the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, one of them called out to him from behind the wall [to his house] saying, “O Muḥammad, come out to us.” Then God Most High revealed the following verse, “Those who call out to thee from behind the apartments – most of them don’t understand” [Q. 49:4], and in the variant reading of Ibn Mas‘ūd, “Banū Tamīm – most of them don’t understand.” God also revealed in this regard, “Make not the calling of the Messenger among you like your calling of one another.” [Q. 24:63]

Abū Bakr and a seller of a robe

Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, may God be pleased with him, saw a man selling a robe, so he said to him, “Will you sell me this robe?” The man said, “No God give you health.” Abū Bakr remarked, “You will be [more] knowledgeable if you [are willing to] learn. Rather say, ‘No, and may God give you health.’”

Al-Ḥasan intervened in a vendetta for blood that had been shed, and the man leading the revenge for the blood shed said, “I will give up the blood revenge for the sake of God and in honor of your faces.” Al-Ḥasan responded, “Wouldn’t you better say, ‘I will give up the blood revenge for the sake of God alone.’”

Speaking about a man’s ill behavior, an Arab bedouin said, “If you converse with him, he tries to get ahead of you in the conversation; and if you let him alone, he relates falsehoods.”

A narrator entered the presence of al-Mahdī and the latter said to him, "Recite to me Zuhayr's poem in which he says:

Whose homes are those on the peak of al-Ḥijr?"

So the narrator recited it all and when he came to its end, al-Mahdī said to him, "Gone, by God, is he who used to say this." The narrator responded, "As is gone, by God, the one to whom it was said." So al-Mahdī considered him ignorant and stupid.

Al-Ma'mūn and Quṭrub

When Quṭrub, the grammarian, presented his book on the Qur'ān to al-Ma'mūn, the latter ordered that he be given a gift and permitted him to enter. On entering, Quṭrub said to the Caliph, "The promise of the Commander of the Faithful was higher than his gift." Al-Ma'mūn was angry and was about to scold him, but Sahl ibn Hārūn said to him, "O Commander of the Faithful, he did not say what he had in his mind, but was rather overcome by his inability to express himself. Don't you see how his forehead is sweating and how he cracks his fingers?" Al-Mu'mūn's anger subsided, and he considered him ignorant and stupid.

Al-Ḥasan al-Lu'lu'i was with al-Ma'mūn in al-Raqqā one evening, keeping him company with pleasant conversation. While talking to him, he noticed that al-Ma'mūn was becoming drowsy, so he said to him, "You're getting sleepy, O Commander of the Faithful!" Al-Ma'mūn returned to alertness and said, "You're vulgar, by the Lord of the Ka'ba! Servant: take him out by the hand."

Abū al-Najm went to see Hishām ibn 'Abd al-Malik and delivered his *rajaz* poem that began with:

Praise be to God, the most generous and most liberal donor ...

which is one of his best poems. When he reached the verse in which he said:

... And the sun in the sky was like the eye of a cross-eyed man,

Hishām became angry, for he was cross-eyed; so he ordered that his nape be smacked [to show his contempt for him] and that he be thrown out.

Kuthayyir 'Azza called on Yazīd ibn 'Abd al-Malik and, while talking to him, he asked, "O Commander of the Faithful, what is the meaning of al-Shammākh's verse that says:

When the cheeks of the wide-eyed cows and deer
Take for pillow the shaded euphorbia in the sand ...?"

Yazīd replied, "So what if the Commander of the Faithful does not know what this boorish, uncouth Arab bedouin, like you, says?" And he considered him stupid and ordered that he be thrown out.

Kuthayyir ʿAzza called on ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Marwān and recited a poem praising him, in which he said:

May you live long, and may there always be one of your family
Who is a leader, greeted behind a drawn curtain;
Who is proud and is one of those going out in ample garments,
Swaying, and wearing perfectly woven Yemenite cloaks,
And who wear wrappers with red edges which they tread
Underfoot with elegant, tongue-shaped Ḥaḍramawt sandals.

ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz liked it and said to him, “Ask for what you need.” Kuthayyir said, “To be appointed by you in place of your secretary, Ibn Rummāna.” “Woe to you,” exclaimed ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, “He is a secretary and you are a poet! How can you replace him and be able to fill his shoes?” When Kuthayyir left him, he regretted [having weakly accepted not to be appointed secretary] and said:

I was surprised by my assent to a state of weakness
After it was clear that ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz had accepted it.
If ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz were to return and offer me a similar position
And let me have possession of it, I would not accept it.
[If I return and ask you again,
Will you give me a better position?]

Al-Aḥnaf ibn Qays and Muḥammad ibn al-Ashʿath stood waiting at the gate of Muʿāwiya’s palace. Muʿāwiya permitted al-Aḥnaf to enter first and then Muḥammad ibn al-Ashʿath, but Muḥammad quickened his steps and entered before al-Aḥnaf. When Muʿāwiya saw al-Aḥnaf, he said to him, “By God, I did not permit him to enter before you, for I wanted you to enter before him. But just as we rule your affairs, so also do we rule your behavior. For no man seeks an increase in his position unless he feels a deficiency in himself.”

ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān said, “There are three kinds of persons that a rational man should not make light of: religious scholars, the ruler, and friends. For whoever makes light of religious scholars perverts his religion, and whoever makes light of the ruler perverts his worldly position, and whoever makes light of friends perverts his manliness.”

ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz and Abū al-Zinād, his secretary

Abū al-Zinād said, “I was a secretary to ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz and he used [to ask me] to write to ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd, his governor of Medina, regarding acts of injustice, but the latter used to refer them back to him. So ʿUmar wrote to him, “It seems to me that if I write asking you to give a man a sheep, you’ll write back to ask whether I meant a sheep or a goat; and if I write to you specifying one of them, you’ll write back to ask whether I meant a male or female; and if I write to you specifying one of them, you’ll write back asking whether I meant a young or an old one. Now when I write to you about an act of injustice, implement my order and don’t refer it back to me.”

Abū Ja'far and Ibn Qutayba

Abū Ja'far wrote to Sālim ibn Qutayba ordering him to demolish the houses of those who had joined the revolt of Ibrāhīm ibn 'Abd Allāh and to cut down their palm trees. So Sālim wrote back to ask him, "With which shall we first begin: the houses or the palm trees?" Abū Ja'far wrote to him, "If I had ordered you to destroy their dates, you would have written to me, 'With which shall we first begin: the Ṣayḥānī [black] dates or the Barnī [yellow] dates?'" He dismissed him and appointed Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān to replace him.

Maḥmūd al-Warrāq said:

How many a harm you have observed
Which you wished would please you.
A young man often seeks
To benefit his brother and yet harms him.

'Adī ibn Arṭa'a went to see Shurayḥ, the judge, and asked him, "Where are you, may God give you prosperity?" The judge said, "Between you and the wall." 'Adī said, "Listen to me." "Speak and we will listen," the judge said. "I am a man from Syria," explained 'Adī. "A remote place," commented Shurayḥ. "I got married at your court," 'Adī added. The judge expressed his good wishes, "In happiness and with [future] sons." "And a son was born to me," 'Adī said. "May he be a horseman," the judge said. "I want her to move away," 'Adī said. "A man has rights over his wife," the judge said. "I stipulated that she would have her own house," 'Adī said. "A stipulation is appropriate." 'Adī said, "Now give your judgment about us." "I have done," the judge said. "Against whom have you judged?" asked 'Adī. "Against the son of your mother," replied the judge. "On the strength of whose testimony?" asked 'Adī. "On the strength of the testimony of your maternal aunt's nephew," the judge said. Shurayḥ meant that 'Adī had acknowledged having stipulated a condition for himself. Shurayḥ was a man wont to make difficult allusions.

Sharik ibn 'Abd Allāh called on Ismā'īl while the latter was perfuming himself with aloe [*al-ʿūd*], so he said to his servant, "Bring some aloe for Abū 'Abd Allāh." [Misunderstanding,] the servant brought a lute [*al-ʿūd*, also called a *barbaṭ*]. Ismā'īl said, "Break it." Turning to Sharik, he explained, "They arrested a man among the guards yesterday and he had this lute with him."

A poet said the following about an incapable servant:

When I order her to bring me a glass of water,
She brings me a plate and raisins.

Ḥabīb said the following about the tribe of Taghlib living in al-Jazīra, attributing roughness and ill-manners to them despite a generosity of spirit:

The gentle amiability of city folks has not nurtured them
And they have gone far from the intelligence of nomads.
If you scrutinize them, you will find they have
Generous spirits and bad manners.

A young man, who was often silent, was sitting with al-Shaʿbī when suddenly he turned to him and said, “I feel a certain itch in my back. Do you advise me to be cupped?” Al-Shaʿbī said, “Praise be to God who changed our conversation from jurisprudence to cupping.”

A plaintiff came one day to Aḥmad ibn al-Khaṣīb to seek justice. The latter took his foot out of the stirrup and kicked him, so a poet said the following about him:

Tell the caliph: O cousin of Muḥammad,
Hobble your minister, he is a kicker.

A merchant sent an agent of his to a highborn man to collect some money he owed him. The agent returned, having been beaten. The merchant said to him, “Woe is you! What’s the matter with you?” The agent replied, “He reviled you, so I reviled him. And so he beat me.” The merchant asked, “And what did he say to you?” The agent replied, “He said, ‘May God insert the donkey’s thing in the cunt of the mother of the one who sent you!’” The merchant said, “Spare me his slander and vilification of me, and rather tell me: how come you gave the donkey’s penis the respect that you did not accord to the cunt of the mother of the one who sent you? Why did you not say: the penis of the donkey in the thing of the mother of the one who sent you?”

A chapter on the young man gaining worldly wisdom

It was said to ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, “So-and-So does not know evil.” He responded, “He is more likely to fall into it.”

Sufyān al-Thawrī said, “He who is unable to act well when young is unable to act well as a hermit.”

ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ said, “A rational man is not the one who distinguishes good from evil; he is rather the one who knows the lesser of two evils.”

A similar idea is the following saying by a poet:

I accepted some humiliation for fear of [undergoing] all of it.
Likewise, one kind of evil is easier to bear than another kind.

Al-Mughīra ibn Shuʿba was asked about ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, and he replied, “By God, he had the excellence that prevented him from being deceptive, and the intelligence that prevented him from being deceived.”

Iyās said, “I am not a swindler, and a swindler will not deceive me.”

Ibn Sirīn and al-Ḥasan had an argument – al-Ḥasan believed that every Muslim may be a witness at court unless an error of his becomes visible or he is proven unreliable by the person against whom he witnesses, but Iyās did not believe that. A man came to al-Ḥasan and said, “O Abū Saʿīd, Iyās has rejected my testimony.” Al-Ḥasan went with him to Iyās and said, “O Abū Wāʾila, why

have you rejected the testimony of this Muslim? God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, 'Whoever prays our prayer, turning his face toward our *qibla* [the Ka'ba in Mecca], is a Muslim; he enjoys all the rights we do, and he incurs all the duties we do.' Iyās replied, "O Abū Sa'īd, God Most Exalted says, '... of those you accept as witnesses' [Q. 2:282], and this man is one of those we do not accept."

ʿĀmir ibn ʿAbd Allāh and the stealing of his stipend

ʿĀmir ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr was extremely pious and virtuous, and had no knowledge of evil. While he was sitting in the mosque, his stipend was brought to him. When he went home, he forgot to take it with him. When he reached his home, he remembered it and said to his servant, "Go to the mosque and bring me my stipend." "Where will we find it?" the servant asked. "Praise be to God!" exclaimed ʿĀmir, "Is there anyone left who takes what is not his?"

Abū Ayyūb said, "Among my friends, I have some whose blessing I hope for but I will not accept their witness."

Fāṭima bint al-Ḥusayn, peace be upon both of them, was mentioned in the presence of ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, who greatly revered her. "She had no knowledge of evil," it was said. ʿUmar said, "Not knowing evil has helped her avoid evil."

People used to like for a lad to have worldly wisdom and for a young man to have youthful passion; and they used to hate white hair before its time and to compare it with the drying of a fruit before it was ripe, believing that this happened only because there was something bad in it.

The most useful friends to sit with, the most gracious of company, the most adroit, the most noble of spirit – are those who are not sly and harmful, who are not abstemious and ascetic, who are not saucy and extreme, and who are not devout worshipers and mortifiers of bodily appetites; but rather, as the poet said:

O Hind, will you take an interest in an old man who is always young?
For there may be youth in persons who are not young men.

Another poet said:

Many a young man, whose age is over fifty,
Will meet you with the appearance of a boy.

Another poet said:

I have an ascetic part of me which I would not like to lose,
And another part for amusement and valor.

Habīb said:

He is a patient old man, an irascible young man,
And in war he is a lion and a nobleman.

Some of what we have said on the same theme is the following:

When he sits with young men, you find him to be a young man;
And if he sits with old people, you find him to be an old man.

Similar to this is the verse of Ibn Ḥiṭṭān [referring to the two rival tribal confederations that inhabited northern and southern Arabia in pre-Islamic times]:

One day, you are a Yemenite when you meet with someone from Yemen;
And if you meet with someone from Maʿadd, you are an ʿAdnānite.

ʿImrān ibn Ḥiṭṭān's verse may have another meaning, but this one is closer and more likely, because he meant that with a Yemenite he is a Yemenite, and with an ʿAdnānite he is an ʿAdnānite, possibly because of his fear of the one he meets or because of his readiness to help him. All this is part of the qualities of worldly wisdom, adroitness, and experience.

It was said, "Have company with a righteous man so that you may follow his example, and with a profligate man so that you may learn worldly experience from him."

It was also said, "Whoever does not have company with the righteous and the profligate will not learn from prosperity and adversity, and will not ever go from the shade to the sun; so don't hope for anything from him."

Similar to this is the saying that So-and-So has milked Time, experiencing its good and bad, and he has drunk its best boons – meaning he has understood its good and evil so that, if wealth befalls him, he recognizes it and it will not make him reckless, and if misfortune befalls him, he bears it patiently and does not censure it.

Hudba al-ʿUdhri said:

I am not joyful when Time pleases me,
Nor am I anxious about its vicissitudes.
I don't wish to suffer evil when it leaves me alone;
But when I am made to do evil, I will.

ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz ibn Zurāra said on this theme:

I lived through phases of life in sundry ways
And I met with soft and hard times.
I experienced both, so prosperity will not make me reckless,
Nor will hardship make me anxiously humbled.
A difficulty will not take possession of me before it befalls me,
And when it does, I am not unable to bear it.

Another poet said:

If you destroy my home treacherously, it is
The inheritance of a nobleman who fears no consequences.

When he intends to do something, he sets his heart upon it resolutely
 And casts aside all mention of consequences.
 He takes the counsel of no one but himself,
 And he accepts only his sword as a companion.
 I will wash away the shame with the sword,
 Whatever God's fate will bring upon me.

Hind was asked about Mu'āwiya and she said, "By God, if the tribe of Quraysh were gathered from every quarter of theirs and he was thrown in the midst of them, he would come out from any of their honorable groups he wished."

This is similar to the verse of the poet, who said:

I declare myself to the Compassionate [God] to be innocent [*barʾ*]
 Of every friend I take, except ʿIrāk ibn Nāʾil.
 When he is between two rows of men, I know him to be able
 To come out safe, either rightly or wrongly.

Another poet said:

Although I am in need of reason, I am
 In some instances more in need of folly [*jahl*].
 I would not [normally] accept folly as my companion,
 But I will accept it when I must.
 If some people say it contains loathsome qualities,
 They are right; but humiliation is more loathsome to a free man.
 I have a horse bridled ready for a reasonable act,
 But I also have a horse saddled ready for a foolish one.
 Whoever wishes to straighten me out [should know] I am so;
 And whoever wishes to make me crooked [should know] I am so.

Mu'āwiya said about Sufyān ibn ʿAwf al-Ghāmīdī, "This is the one who should not be slowed down when in haste, who should not be nudged in the back when he is slow, and who should not be urged to do things as a slow camel is beaten [to spur it on]."

Al-Hasan ibn Hānīʿ said:

Who will help the two-year-old horses when the racing track is long
 As they run against a five-year-old horse that can cover long distances?
 He is a person whom adversity will not reduce by a fingertip,
 And whom prosperity will not cause to ascend the slopes of hills.

Jarīr said:

When the young of a milch-camel is forced into a strait,
 It cannot compete with the big, nine-year-old camels.

A chapter on the helpful and harmful man

It is said that a man is *kharrāj wallāj* [able to get out and in] [a wheeler-dealer] and that he is *ḥumwal qullab* [changeable and inconstant] when he is able to manage matters by being helpful to his friends and harmful to his enemies. If he is otherwise, it is said that he can neither sweeten nor embitter anything; that he can be counted neither with the caravan nor with those who call for battle [that is, he is of no consequence]; and that there is neither good to be hoped from him nor evil to be feared.

Someone said, "A rational man will not allow himself to be anything but a leader in good or evil."

A poet said:

If you cannot be helpful, then be harmful; for
A young man is hoped for in order to harm and help.

Ḥabīb [Abū Tammām] said:

I see no use for a man who is not harmful,
Nor do I see harm in a man who does not help.

A bedouin Arab heard a man say, "So-and-So has not brought about a day of good at all." He said, "If he has not brought about a day of good, he has brought about a day of evil."

A poet said:

The Banū Dhubyān have not done good,
Nor have the Banū Dhubyān done evil.

Another poet said:

May God denounce an enmity that is not feared
And a much-vaunted blood relationship that offers no help.

A man boasted and said, "My father is the one who killed kings, seized pulpits, and did this and that!" Another man said to him, "But he was captured, killed, and crucified." So he answered him, "Let's not talk about his capture, his killing, and his crucifixion. Has your father ever talked himself into any act of this kind?"

A man criticized his people after Banū Shaybān had attacked his camels and his people had not responded to his call for help, being known for weakness, and he said:

If I had been from the tribe of Māzin, the sons of the foundling
From Dhuhl ibn Shaybān would not have seized my camels unpunished.
A group of men, who are rough when angered, would have risen
To support me if a crazy, impetuous man was ever soft.
They would not ask their brother when he sought their help
In calamities for a proof in evidence of what he had said.
If evil ever showed its teeth to them, they are people

Who would fly to it, in groups as well as singly.
 But my own people, even though numerous,
 Are not ones to deal with evil, even if it is easy to deal with.
 They reward the oppressors with forgiveness of their oppression
 And they do good to evildoers for their evil deeds.
 It is as though your Lord God had not created anyone to fear Him
 But them as human beings among all people.
 I wish I had instead of them a group of men who, when mounted,
 Launch their raid, as single horsemen and as hordes of cavalry.

He did not mean by this to ascribe gentleness to them or fear of God; what he meant was to describe their [willingness to endure] humiliation and weakness, just as the Negus said of Tamim ibn Muqbil's people:

His tribe does not ever break any promise
 And they are never unfair to people by [the weight of] a mustard seed.
 They come to drink from a fountain in the evening only,
 When [all the other] drinkers have left the fountains.

Whoever is helpful regarding one thing will be harmful regarding something else.
 Similar to this is what Ashja' ibn 'Amr said:

With his sword, he captures necks [of men]
 And frees from slavery other necks.

[Abū Nuwās] Al-Ḥasan ibn Hānī said:

Mankind hopes for your two states and fears them,
 It is as if you were Paradise and Hell-fire.

On this theme, we said the following:

Who else but you can be hoped for or feared,
 When generosity and power are in your hands.
 So long as you live, people will be in prosperity;
 And if you die, people will die with you.

Another poet said:

The paragon of young men is not one who drinks
 Morning wine on going out and evening wine on coming in.
 The paragon of young men is rather the one who
 Harms an enemy or benefits a friend, morning and evening.

A chapter on seeking objects of desire and bearing losses

In a book from India, we read, "Whoever is not willing to embark on frightful dangers will not obtain the objects of his desire; and whoever abandons a matter from which he may obtain his object, fearing what he may be spared, will not

attain much. A man of valor and noble character may be unknown and of lowly position; but his valor and nobility will motivate him to seek the heights and rise, just as a flame of fire rises despite the protective will of its handler. The merit of a meritorious man will not remain hidden, even if he conceals it, just as musk kept in a sealed container cannot be prevented from having its fragrance flare up and spread.”

On this theme, we have said:

A flask of musk may be sealed
 But it persists in spreading fragrance.
 The merit of a meritorious man is not hidden
 By falsehood or by untruth.
 He who is prominent in virtue
 Does not need anyone to vouch for it.
 The sighting of the crescent [moon] on the Feast of al-Fiṭr
 May be obscured on a night of doubt,
 But light will reveal the crescent's face
 And it will allay all darkness.
 You do not go out to sea
 Without a boat,
 And you do not organize pearls
 Without a threading string.
 Pure gold becomes pure
 Only after smelting.
 This is a collection of proverbs;
 So let him, who wishes, cite them.
 They have invalidated every
 Yemenite, Syrian, and Meccan saying.
 They have not been formulated by al-ʿAynī
 Or woven by al-ʿAkkī.

It was said, “A rational man ought to be only in one of two positions: either seeking the world to the utmost degree or abandoning it to the utmost degree. He ought to be seen in only two places: either honored with kings or pious and chaste with worshipers. A loss is not considered a loss if it brings a gain, and a gain is not considered a gain if it brings a loss.”

Muʿāwiya and ʿAlī's soldiers in the Battle of Ṣiffin

When Muʿāwiya saw the soldiers of ʿAlī, may God be pleased with him, in the Battle of Ṣiffin, he said, “Whoever seeks to achieve something great will risk losing his greatest body part.” And he pointed to his head.

[Abū Tammām] Ḥabīb [ibn Aws] al-Ṭāʿī said:

O woman blaming me: How rough the night is!
 Rougher than it is the night rider in calamities.

Leave me alone to face and endure time's dangers,
For its great dangers are followed by its desired things.

Kaʿb ibn Zuhayr said:

A person who does not embark on danger has no object of desire,
And a saddle which God has taken down has no one to carry it.
If you do not turn away from foolishness and obscenity,
You will hurt a decent man or a foolish man will hurt you.

Al-Shammākh said:

He is a young man who is not content with a minimum living,
And one who does not enter the tents of the tribe [uninvited].
He fills the ebony bowl [with food] and gives his spearheads [blood] to drink,
And he cuts off the head of the brave man bristling with arms.

Imruʿ al-Qays said:

I wish what I could aspire to were a minimum living;
A little money would have been sufficient for me, and I'd seek no more.
But what I aspire to is deep-rooted glory,
And those like me are likely to achieve deep-rooted glory.

Another poet said:

If it were not for the gloating of envious enemies
Or for my being able to help those who put their hope on me,
I would not have sought the pursuits of this world
Nor would I have sacrificed my honor and religion for it.
But competing with the enemies makes me
Do things which, I think, will kill me.
And why not? Why would I be content with a situation
In which I have neither a religion nor a world to my liking?

Al-Ḥuṭayʿa said, satirizing al-Zibriqān ibn Badr:

Leave noble deeds alone, don't make an effort to seek them,
And rather sit down – you are [merely] one to be fed and clothed.

Al-Zibriqān appealed to ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb against him and recited the verse to him. ʿUmar said, "I don't think there is any harm in what he said." "By God, O Commander of the Faithful," al-Zibriqān protested, "I have never been satirized by a more severe verse than this." ʿUmar sent for [the poet] Ḥassān [ibn Thābit] and asked him, "Has he satirized him?" Ḥassān said, "He has not only satirized him, he has defecated on him."

A modern poet

A modern poet borrowed this idea from al-Ḥuṭayʿa and said:

I have found that, of noble deeds, enough for you
Is to wear silk clothes and eat to satiety.
When noble deeds are ever mentioned in a meeting
In which you are present, mask your faces.

It was said, “Whoever is not willing to embark on frightful dangers will not obtain the objects of his desires; and whoever seeks great things risks losing the greater part of his body [his head].”

When the head of Yazīd ibn al-Muhallab was brought to Yazīd ibn ʿAbd al-Malik and some of the companions sitting with him maligned Ibn al-Muhallab, Yazīd said, “Yazīd embarked on a great thing, sought [to accomplish] a momentous deed, and died a noble death.”

A poet said:

Don’t be satisfied when a quest of yours is possible;
But if quests turn out to be unachievable, then be content.

A free nobleman is naturally disposed not to be content with anything given to him of this world’s and the next world’s exalted things. He always aspires to that which is of a higher rank and a more elevated status. That is why ʿUmar ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz said to Dukayn, the *rajaṣ* poet, “I have a yearning soul. If you hear that I have reached a position higher than the one I now have, I will indeed want to see you.” (He said this when he was governor of Medina for Caliph Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik.) When ʿUmar became caliph, Dukayn came to see him. ʿUmar said to him, “As I told you, I have a yearning soul. My soul yearned to reach the highest positions of this world; and when I reached them, I found my soul yearning for the highest positions of the hereafter.”

A proof of this idea is that Moses, God’s blessings be upon him, asked God to let him see Him when God spoke to him in audible words [only]. For if he could reach seeing God, that would have been a higher position than the one he had obtained [by only speaking with Him], but his aspiration extended to what was impossible to reach. All this shows that a free nobleman is not content with a given position when he sees the possibility of what is higher than it.

The following is some of what we have said on this theme:

A free man is not content with obtaining an honor,
For he will soon wish for another, to obtain which leads to perdition.
Hope moves him onward, beyond which is death;
If fear deters him, desire invites him on.
That’s why Moses asked his Lord, “Let me see [You],
I will look at You,” and his request was astonishing.
For he seeks to have more honor, above the honor he has obtained,
And yet he is the confidant who possesses revelation and scriptures.

Describing a cousin of his as one who embarked on frightful dangers and spent money generously, Ta'abbata Sharran said:

I offer my laudatory verse and intend it
 For Shums ibn Mālik, my truthful cousin.
 With it, I'll make him hold his head high in the tribal council
 As he made me hold my head high with *arāk*-eating, white camels.
 He hardly complains of any adversity that afflicts him;
 He travels far and wide, and has many ways and passions.
 He abides in one desert and spends the evening in another
 By himself, and he embarks on dangerous tasks.
 Mounted on a speedy horse which runs continuously,
 He races with the wind wherever it blows.
 When sleep closes his eyes, his resolute heart
 Continues to protect him and be ready to defend him.
 He makes his eyes observant of his heart,
 So that he may ever be ready to unsheathe his smooth, sharp sword.
 If he wields his sword into the bones of an adversary,
 The teeth in the laughing mouth of death rejoice.

Another poet said the following verses (rather they are his too):

If a man does not contrive when serious matters arise,
 He loses, and suffers while he is turning away from them.
 A man of determination is someone who, when a mishap occurs,
 Is ever ready for it and foresees what is intended to be done.
 He is experienced by time and knows its vicissitudes as long as he lives;
 If one of his nostrils is blocked, his other nostril opens up with agitation.

A chapter on movement and inaction

Wahb ibn Munabbih said, "In the Torah, it is written, 'O son of Adam, I created you from movement for the purpose of movement. Therefore move, and I will be with you.'"

It is also written in one of the books, "O son of Adam, stretch out your hand to the door of work, and I will open to you a door of livelihood."

ʿUtba ibn Rabīʿa consulted his brother Shayba ibn Rabīʿa about seeking pasture and said, "I am suffering from drought, and whoever suffers from drought seeks pasture." His words became a proverb. Shayba said to him, "It is not dignified to expose oneself to humiliation." His words became a proverb too. ʿUtba responded, "A lion will not break the necks [of prey] while crouching." His words became a proverb likewise.

Ḥabīb [Abū Tammām] borrowed this idea and said:

He wanted to achieve wealth while remaining meekly inactive.
 A lion will not break the necks [of prey] while crouching.

Al-Aʿshā of the tribe of Bakr was asked, “How long will you continue to seek pasture and be away from home? Will you not be satisfied with an easy life and equanimity?” He quipped, “If sunshine were permanent, you would get bored with it.”

Ḥabīb [Abū Tammām] borrowed this idea and said:

A man’s long residence in his tribe’s homeland will wear out his cheeks.
Therefore, go away from your homeland, and you will renew yourself.
I note that people’s love for the sun increases
Because it does not shine on them always.

Abū Saʿīd Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Makkī said, “I heard al-Shāfiʿī say, ‘I have composed two verses of poetry.’ Then he recited them to us:

I have noticed that my soul yearns for Egypt;
But to reach it, I have to cross deserts and wastelands.
By God, I don’t know whether I am led to it
To enjoy easy life and wealth or I am led to my grave?

“When he entered Egypt, he died.”

Mūsā (Moses) ibn ʿImrān, peace be upon him, said, “Don’t speak ill of travel, for I have achieved through it what no one else has.” He meant that God, may He be Exalted, spoke to him in audible words during travel.

Al-Maʿmūn said, “There is nothing more pleasant than travel when you have sufficiency [for it], for you stay every day in a place you have never stayed in and you meet people you have never met.”

A poet said:

Let not ease of life and equanimity prevent you
From changing one homeland for another;
For in every country you stay in you will meet
Relatives and friends, like your own relatives and friends.

Yet, residing in one place causes boredom.

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “Visit [others] at intervals, and your love will increase.”

Wise men have said, “Rest can be obtained only by fatigue, and equanimity can be attained only by exertion.”

Ḥabīb said:

You have observed that the greatest rest
Can be obtained only across a bridge of fatigue.

He also said:

Only through dispersal of union have I achieved
An accumulated wealth to be glad at.

And life has not given me comfortable sleep
To enjoy, except through uneasy restless sleep.

He also said:

Horsemen like spearheads dismounted to camp at night
In a place as sharp as their spearheads, and darkness reigned;
They had an obligatory order, whose initial parts they had to fulfill,
But whose consequences they did not have to worry about.

After the above is known, is it permissible for any imagination, or is it acceptable to any mind, or is it reasonable in any reckoning that one can harvest a crop without seeds or reap a fruit without planting or have fire from flint without striking or have profit from wealth without diligent application of oneself?

That is why al-Khalil ibn Aḥmad said, "You only reach what you need by knowing what you don't need." Abū Shamir, the theologian, said to him, "You are, therefore, in need of what you don't need because you can reach what you need only by what you don't need." "Woe to you!" al-Khalil replied, "Will a sharp sword cut without striking, or will a race horse run without galloping or will an end be achieved without seeking it and hurrying toward it? However, poverty may accompany hard work, and disappointment may accompany fear."

A poet said:

I continued to cross the country
From East to West,
To arm myself with fear in the darkness,
To seek direction from Capricorn, Ursa Major, and Ursa Minor,
To be enveloped in cares and worries,
Until I returned empty-handed.
How much longer will I continue to be in a state
Of penury and complete destitution,
With no friends and many enemies,
And with little advantage to my parents?

Situations like this one are a few among many; but one should rather generalize by the majority of cases – success comes with hard work, and deprivation is more likely to accompany incapacity [to do hard work].

Ḥabīb [Abū Tammām] explained this idea by saying:

A young man's endeavors in the world are planted branches
Of wealth, but they do not bear leaves all the time.

And concerning quests, Ismāʿil ibn Ibrāhīm al-Ḥamdūnī said:

[My lady,] your eyes are coy and coquettish;
To tear my eyes away from them makes me more languid [*akall*] [than they].
I see your cheeks like fresh roses

Bedewed by the tears flowing from my eyes.
 Your words are sweet, if only they are not marred by
 Repeated lies that let my hearing go astray.
 ‘Azzā who, among other women, has haughtily disdained me
 Has transformed her abundance to me into paucity.
 I have continued to be in the umbrage of your shadow
 Until a shadow of perils has developed above me.
 Worthier of you is a desire for me,
 Which does not allow humiliation to occur.
 With my sharp sword
 And my keen spearhead that cannot be dented,
 And with my radiance which is like a garden in a rough land
 Made to laugh by a down-pouring cloud,
 And with my tongue between my jaws overcoming
 And humbling every difficult, proud man,
 [With all these:] what is the use of my abiding
 Intoxicated with the wine of ineptitude, given to me
 To drink one gulp after another?
 If your closeness is important in my view,
 The least resoluteness [*hazm*] [on my part] is more important than it.
 Will a disabled man be a companion to a woman?
 [I consider] every companion of my deficiency disloyal to me.
 Woe to you! A lion will not be able to bring out
 Another lion from his thicket if he is weak [*kall*].
 Therefore, abandon reproof and censure—
 All your reproof is regarding stinginess.
 [Your man] is a sword whose scabbard is his cloak,
 And he is wielded by determination [*hazm*] when unsheathed.
 When a crossbreed hyena sees him, he does not doubt
 That, in the deserts, he is [like him] a smooth crossbreed hyena.
 Within his clothing, there is a man of resolute actions
 Which are feared by grave events.
 Camels and deserts are not strangers to him,
 If a home and a camping site consider me a stranger.
 Therefore, lessen your censure
 Which does not see time’s vicissitudes become less.
 The wide stride of camels bears fruit in a livelihood
 To be gained by [riders of] speedy horses and camels.
 Don’t blunt the sharpness of my determination by censure,
 I am a friend of Determination and Time.
 A [true] young man is one whose protected land is never used
 As pasture by a covetous person who intends humiliating him.
 He is one who, if a disaster befalls him,
 Remains abidingly steadfast and patient.
 He accompanies a newborn night until
 The night grows old, but he is not bored.

He knows night travel might chew him continually
 But being night's mouthful, he will not let it stink.
 His garments are tucked up in the night,
 And his robe is ample and flowing.
 I will lose sleep so that you may see me [sooner],
 Someone who loses me will honor and revere me.
 To build one's glory, one needs to destroy indecencies;
 And to remove poverty, one needs constant travel and camping.

A chapter on seeking subsistence and benefits for one's family and children

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, "Someone benefiting his family and children is like a fighter for the cause of God."

He also said, may God bless him and grant him peace, "The upper hand is better than the lower hand [meaning, the hand that gives is better than the one that receives], and begin [giving] with those you support."

Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said, "Let no one of you refrain from seeking his subsistence and say, 'O God, give me subsistence.' He should know that heaven rains neither gold nor silver, and that God Most High only gives human beings subsistence by letting them give one another subsistence." And he recited the saying of God Most Exalted, "And when the prayer is finished, disperse in the land and seek God's bounty, and remember God much; haply you may prosper." [Q. 62:10]

Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfiʿī said, "Be bent on what is useful for you and ignore what people say, for one can never be safe from the tongues of common people."

A similar saying is that of Mālik ibn Dīnār, "Whoever knows himself is not harmed by what people say about him."

Ṭāhir ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz said, "ʿAlī ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz related to us that Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām recited the following:

The perfection of a perfect man is not diminished
 By whatever good he provides his dependents with.

Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, may God be pleased with him, said, "O reciters [of the Qurʾān], seek a means of living and don't be a burden on people."

Aktham ibn Ṣayfi said, "Whoever loses his traveling provisions will have to depend on those of others."

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, "The best one among you is the one who will neither abandon his hereafter for the sake of his present world, nor his present world for the sake of his hereafter."

ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ said, "Work for your present world like someone who would live forever, and work for your hereafter like someone who would die tomorrow."

A man was mentioned to the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, as someone known for his diligence in worship and capability to work. They said [to the Prophet], “We accompanied him in travel and we saw that there was no one more given to worship than you, O God’s Messenger, but he: he was not distracted from any prayer and he did not break any fast.” The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, asked, “Who, then, provided for him and served him?” “All of us,” they said. The Prophet said, “All of you, therefore, are more given to worship than he is.”

Christ passed by an Israelite who was devoting himself [to God’s worship]. “What are you doing?” Christ asked. “I’m devoting myself [to God’s worship],” the man answered. “And who serves you?” Christ asked. The man answered, “My brother.” Christ said, “Your brother, then, is more devoted to God’s worship than you are.”

God has made seeking subsistence a duty to all creatures: human beings, jinn, birds, and insects – some by teaching, and others by inspiration. People of learning and thought seek it in the best ways of acting and circumspection, and weak lazy people seek it in the worst ways such as by begging, dependence, deception, and trickery.

A chapter on the merit of wealth

God, Most High, said, “Wealth and sons are the ornament of the life of the present world; but the abiding good works are better in the sight of your Lord with regard to reward and better with regard to hope.” [Q. 18:46]

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said to al-Mujāshīʿ, “If you have wealth, you [will also] have noble descent; and if you have moral character, you [will also] have manliness; and if you have religion, you [will also] have generosity.”

ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said, “A man’s noble descent is his wealth; his generosity is his religion; and his manliness is his moral character.”

In a book of *adab* by al-Jāḥiẓ, we read, “Know that the fruitful use of wealth is a means for noble deeds, an aid for religiosity, and a medium to harmonize friends. He who loses wealth is less desired and less feared by others, and he who is not in a position to be desired or feared by people will be disdained by them. Therefore, do your best so that the hearts of others may be attached to you by desire or fear in matters of religion or worldly affairs.”

A wise man said to his son, “My son, you should seek wealth. If there is nothing in it but dignity in your heart and humiliation in the enemy’s heart, this would be sufficient.”

ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās said, “[The most worthy thing of] this world is well-being; of youth, health; of manliness, patience; of high-mindedness, piety; and of noble descent, wealth.”

Saʿd ibn ʿUḇāda used to say, “O God, grant me diligence and glory; for there is no glory without deeds, and there are no deeds without wealth.”

Wise men have said, “There is no good in someone who does not acquire wealth to preserve his honor, protect his manliness, and be helpful to his blood relationships with it.”

ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿAwf said, “How nice it is to have wealth by which I would preserve my honor and come closer to my Lord.”

Sufyān al-Thawrī said, “Wealth is a believer’s weapon in these times.”

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “What an excellent aid to God’s obedience affluence is, and what an excellent ladder to God’s obedience affluence is!” And he recited, “If they had observed the Torah and the Gospel and what has been revealed to them from their Lord, they would have eaten [of good things] both what was above them and under their feet” [Q. 5:66]; and His saying, “... Seek forgiveness of your Lord; for He is abundantly forgiving. He will loose heaven upon you in torrents and will succor you with wealth and sons ...” [Q. 71:11–12].

Khālīd ibn Ṣafwān said to his son, “O son, I advise you to hold fast to two things: your money for your livelihood and your religion for your hereafter.”

ʿUrwa ibn al-Ward said:

Let me strive for affluence, for
I have observed that the worst of people is the poor man,
Who is most scorned and humiliated by them
Even if he later acquires high honor and distinction.
His close relative pushes him away, his wife
Scorns him, and the little one chides him.
But you will see that the affluent man has loftiness
That makes his heart almost fly.
An offense by him is considered slight, even if it is momentous;
A rich man has a Lord readily inclined to pardon.

Another poet said:

I shall acquire wealth or else die in a town
In which few tears are shed on my grave.

And another said:

I shall spur on the camels to the utmost until stopped, one day,
By an abundance of riches or an abundance of misfortunes.
For death is indeed better than a life in which a mark of humiliation
Is seen branding a man because of his penury.
Whenever he speaks, no one listens to his good speech;
And if he does not speak, people say, “He is inarticulate.”
It is as if wealth – may wealth be blessed—
Speaks with a tongue for people without a tongue.

Al-Riyāshī said, “Abū Bakr ibn ‘Ayyāsh recited to us the following:

Perplexed, he knows that wealth has given him
 What no religiosity or morality has given.
 If it were not for three thousand bundles of coins I can convey
 To three thousand [places], roads would have been blocked before me.
 If anyone asks me about noble-minded people, [I would say,]
 The most noble-minded is the one who has silver.”

Another poet said:

People have come to respect you when you became rich,
 For every rich man is respectable in people’s eyes.
 But if you were poor and had not been granted wealth,
 You’d have been contemptible to them, for a poor man is contemptible.

Maḥmūd al-Warrāq said:

I see that every wealthy man is revered because of his wealth,
 Although he has no noble origin and no merit.
 Therefore, honor the wealthy wherever you find them:
 Their speech is [considered good] speech, and their deeds [good] deeds.

Abū Muḥallim recited the following verses to a man who was one of the offspring
 of Ṭaliba ibn Qays ibn ‘Āṣim:

When I quarreled with an enemy, I used to throw him
 Prostrate; but now money quarrels with me
 And when we dispute, it overcomes me
 And people say, “Get up – you are unfair.”

Al-Riyāshī recited the following to me:

Nothing remains for me when seeking wealth
 But to expose myself to all means of death.
 Let me then throw my heart
 Among spearheads and swords,
 And let me seek [wealth], even if I see
 Death gleaming in the ranks [of fighters].

Uḥayḥa ibn al-Julāḥ had three hundred water-carrying camels in al-Zawra³
 [a plot of land of his named after a well in it]. One day he picked up a date he
 found in a garden of his and he was reprovved for that, so he said, “One date
 added to another [eventually] makes many dates, and one camel added to another
 [eventually] makes a herd.” Then he began reciting:

I will continue to cultivate al-Zawra³—
 Beloved by friends is the one who has wealth.
 Don’t be deceived by a relative or a kinsman

Be it a cousin, a paternal uncle, or a maternal uncle.
 Every call [for help] I make disappoints me
 Except my call when I say, "O my wealth!"

On this theme, we said:

Let me preserve myself from humiliation,
 Although I am away from my family and my offspring.
 They said, "You've gone far from friends!" I said to them,
 "I have no friend but what my hand can hold when folded."

Al-Rumāḥis ibn Ḥafṣa ibn Qays and a cousin of his named Rabiʿa ibn al-Ward lived in al-Urdunn. The latter was wealthy but the former was impecunious and often complained of being needy. Rabiʿa used to sympathize with him and have some compassion with him, but when al-Rumāḥis carried his complaint to extremes, Rabiʿa wrote to him the following verses:

When a man does not seek a livelihood for himself,
 He complains of poverty or blames a friend and goes too far in that.
 He becomes a burden on his near kin, and his relationship
 With them reaches a point where it is almost denied.
 Go about, therefore, in God's wide world and seek riches,
 And you will live in prosperity or you will die and be excused.
 For a seeker of needs, as far as they are sought
 In wealth, is only the one who works hard and makes an effort.
 And don't be satisfied with a low living, and don't sleep:
 How can one who is impecunious sleep at night?

A wise man said, "Wealth makes a mean man respected, and poverty makes an exalted man humiliated." And he recited the following verses:

I see that people endeavor to surround a rich man;
 If he says anything, they agree with him and believe him.
 This is the habit of people, so long as the man is rich;
 But if he loses his wealth one day, they disperse.

And he recited:

People side only with the world and with the one who owns it;
 Wherever the world takes him, they go too.
 They magnify the [successful] man of the world, but
 If it turns its back upon him, they turn their backs too.

Kinds of wealth

Muʿāwiya said to Ṣaʿṣaʿa ibn Ṣūḥān, "You only say what comes to your tongue and you do not scrutinize whether the words are crooked or straight. But if you

were [willing] to scrutinize [things more closely], tell me about the best kind of wealth.” Ša‘ša‘a said, “By God, O Commander of the Faithful, I do not let words come out until they have fermented in my chest. I do not spurt them out impulsively without contemplation, nor do I go deep after them until I straighten their crookedness and polish their texture. The best kind of wealth is a dark grain of wheat in a dusty soil, or a pale ewe in a green garden, or a gurgling fountain in a soft plot of land.” “God be your help,” exclaimed Mu‘āwiya, “what about gold and silver?” “They are only two stones knocking each other,” Ša‘ša‘a replied. “If you use them, they will run out; and if you leave them alone, they do not increase.”

An Arab bedouin woman was asked, “What do you think of one hundred goats?” “Chattels,” she replied. “How about one hundred sheep?” she was asked. “Riches,” she replied. “And how about one hundred camels?” she was asked. “Wishes,” she replied.

‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Ḥasan said, “Yield from houses is beggary, yield from palms is sufficiency, and yield from grains is property.”

In the Ḥadīth [Prophet Muḥammad said], “The best kind of wealth for you is a mare, in whose belly is a mare that will be followed by a mare; and a wakeful eye watching over a sleeping eye.”

Faraj ibn Sallām recited the following verses by an Iraqi poet:

Advising Ḥajib, I say to him,
 “Leave inessential things alone and buy a plot of land.
 I think the usefulness of land abides;
 As for money, it is dissipated and consumed.
 Beware of people who outwardly show love to you
 Whose hearts and eyes are sick [with envy];
 If an opportunity presents itself to them,
 They abandon deception and reveal their hatred.”

Management of wealth

It was said, “A stupid man will not have wealth, a conciliator will not be reduced to poverty, and the best kind of wealth is that which feeds you and not that which you feed.”

The author of *Kalīla and Dimna* said, “Let a wealthy man spend his wealth on three things: on charity, if he desires the hereafter; on flattering the ruler, if he desires renown; and on women, if desires the pleasures of life.”

He also said, “A worldly man seeks three things, and can achieve them only by four things. As for the three things he seeks, they are: luxury in living, rank in society, and provision in the hereafter. As for the four things by which these three can be achieved, they are: earning wealth by the best means, managing it well, increasing it fruitfully, and spending it on what promotes good living, satisfies family and friends, and is beneficial in the hereafter. If he misses out on

any one of these four things, he will not achieve any one of those three things. If he does not earn, he will not have any wealth to live by; if he is wealthy and earns but does not manage his wealth well, he will eventually perish and be without wealth; if he spends his wealth and does not increase it fruitfully, less spending of it will not prevent it from running out – just like kohl, which only as little of it as dust is taken on the dipstick but it will run out quickly nevertheless; if he earns wealth, manages it well, increases it fruitfully, and does not spend it on legitimate ends, he will be like a poor man who has no wealth – and this will not prevent his wealth from being lost and becoming of no use, just like someone who blocks water that runs into a containing place: if no amount of it comes out equal to the amount that comes in, the water will overflow in all directions and will be wasted.”

This is similar to the saying of God, Most High, “And those who, when they spend, are neither extravagant nor parsimonious but moderate between the two.” [Q. 25:67], and His saying, may He be exalted, to His Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, “And keep not thy hand chained to thy neck, nor stretch it out entirely lest thou sit down reproached and denuded.” [Q. 17:29]

‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās saw a dirham in a man’s hand, so he said to him, “It is not yours until it goes out of your hand.” He meant that he would not benefit from it until he spent it and another person benefited from it in his place.

Al-Ḥuṭay’a said:

He is a beneficent man and a spendthrift: if you ask him to give,
His face beams with joy and he shakes with elation like an Indian sword.

Muslim ibn al-Walid said:

He does not know wealth until he spends it
Or when he collects it to be looted and scattered.

Another poet said:

... He is destructive of wealth and beneficial with wealth.

Sufyān al-Thawrī said, “Whoever has any wealth in his possession, let him improve it; for he lives in a time when, if he becomes needy, his religion will be the first thing he will sacrifice.”

Al-Mutalammis said:

Retention of wealth is easier than seeking it
And traveling abroad [after it] with no provisions.
Improving a little wealth brings increase to it;
But great wealth will not last with prodigality.

Sa’d al-Qaṣīr said, “‘Utba appointed me to manage his properties in al-Ḥijāz; so when I bade him farewell, he said to me, ‘O Sa’d, take care of my little properties

so that they may increase, and don't neglect my big properties lest they become little; for I will never let any one of my big properties distract me from improving any one of my little properties and, if I have little money in hand, this does not prevent me from being patient with the many things that happen to me.' When I came to Medina, I told the leading men of Quraysh about that, so they sent letters concerning this matter to the agents."

Destitution

Aristotle said, "Wealth in a strange land is a homeland, while a destitute man is a stranger among his own people."

A poet borrowed this idea and said:

By your life, a stranger is not someone far away [from his homeland].
Rather, a destitute man is the one who is a stranger.
If a man is in want, he is unable to accomplish anything
About his need; even a close relative will send him away.

Ibrāhīm al-Shaybānī said, "On a wall in Jerusalem, I saw the following verses written in gold:

When a destitute man goes out to do an errand,
He is considered guilty by everyone he meets.
My cousins used to say to me, 'Welcome.'
But when they saw me in straitened circumstances, their welcome died."

On this theme, we said:

O you who blame me, you have given me pain, woe to you!
Blame: for polytheism is not as heinous as the sin of being destitute.
My love for you has invalidated my right to what you owe me
As bankruptcy invalidates the right of a creditor.
The most excusable thing that makes a person weep is seeing
A generous, noble man who sees the world in the hands of a mean one.
I see many a stupid, inarticulate man wallowing in wealth,
While a man of grace and wit is only seen destitute.

[Abū Nuwās] al-Ḥasan ibn Hānīʿ said:

Praise be to God that I have no possessions
And so, my back is unburdened and my offspring are tired of me.
Whoever sets his eyes on me
Knows fully what my hands possess.

Abū al-Shamaqmaq, the poet, was a witty man of letters who was an ever-complaining and destitute tramp. He stayed at home in his tatters and when someone knocked on his door, he opened it a crack and looked out; if he liked the

person standing there, he opened the door for him; otherwise, he ignored him. One of his friends came to him and entered; and when he saw his bad condition, he said to him, "Good news, Abū al-Shamaqmaq, for we read in a *ḥadīth* that those who are naked in this world will be the ones well-clothed on Resurrection Day." "If what you say is true," Abū al-Shamaqmaq said, "I will certainly be a cloth merchant on Resurrection Day." Then he recited:

I am in a condition, oh what a condition!
 May my Lord be exalted!
 I have become so slim that
 The sun has erased my shadow.
 Whoever desires to see something impossible,
 I am the very impossible, in person.
 I have absolutely nothing, so that if
 Someone asks, "Whose is this?" I say, "Mine."
 I am so bankrupt that my own food
 Is legal for my dependents.
 May all the people be damned,
 Both women and men.
 If there were a single free, noble person among them
 I would not have been in such a condition.

He also said:

Do you think I will ever see a day,
 In which I'll have a mount other than my legs?
 Whenever I am in a group and they say,
 "Be ready for travel," I ready my shoes.
 Wherever I am, I don't leave a saddle behind;
 Whoever sees me, sees my saddle and me.

He also said:

If you see my bed, you'll have mercy on me;
 For, God knows, I have no cover for it.
 And, God knows, I have no bedding for it
 Except for a mat, tatters, and a rug.

He also said:

I have come out of houses and domes,
 And so, nobody has any difficulty in shutting me out.
 My home is the open space and my ceiling
 Is God's sky or fragments of the clouds.
 Whenever you want, you can enter my home
 Greeting me without [waiting at] a door;
 For I have not found a door panel
 That would extend from the clouds to the earth.

The ground has not split open to give me a closet
 In which I would hope to hang my clothes.
 I do not fear the escape of my slaves,
 Nor do I fear the death of my riding animals,
 Nor have I ever asked my household manager for an accounting
 And feared of being mistaken in the accounts.
 In this, there is peace of mind and leisure for me.
 This has always been Time's habit, and it is mine too.

In a book from India, we read, "Followers, companions, relatives, friends, helpers, and servants are worth having only when associated with wealth. I think that nothing brings out one's knightly virtues, opinion, and power but wealth. I have found that, when anyone with no wealth wants to do anything, he is prevented by the lack of it; and so he remains unable to do what he wants, like water that is left behind in the valleys from summer rain and does not run to a sea or a river but stays still until it is dried by the earth. I have also found that whoever has no friends [*ikhmān*] has no relatives, and whoever has no offspring has no abiding commemoration, and whoever has no intellect has neither life in this world nor in the hereafter – [in short,] whoever has no wealth has nothing. That is so because when a man is poor, he is rejected by his friends [*ikhmān*] and cut off by his blood relatives; and, to satisfy his need and that of his dependents, he may be obliged to seek sustenance from that which tempts him to endanger his religion and his world, and so he loses both his world and the hereafter. There is nothing worse than poverty: a tree growing on the roadside [with fruits] eaten on every side is in a better situation than a poor man in need of what other people have in their hands. Poverty makes a poor man hate people, it impairs intellect and knightly virtues, it does away with learning and refinement, and it is a source of accusations and congeries of calamities. I have found that, when a man becomes poor, he ends up being distrusted by those who used to trust him, and that any quality that is considered praise and embellishment for a rich man is a cause of dispraise and disgrace for a poor man. If he is courageous, he is said to be reckless; if he is generous, he is said to be a spendthrift; if he is forbearing, he is said to be weak; if he is grave, he is said to be doltish; if he is taciturn, he is said to be inarticulate; and if he is eloquent, he is said to be garrulous. Death is easier than poverty that obliges one to beg, especially to beg of the mean; for if a generous man were to be charged with putting his hand into a dragon's mouth and extract poison from it and swallow it, this would be easier for him than begging of a mean, miserly person."

Begging

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, "If anyone of you were to take his ropes, gather firewood, and carry it on his back, he would find it easier for him to do that than to approach a man to whom God had granted of

His bounty and to beg of him, whether the latter gave him anything or withheld it from him.”

It was said, “Whoever opens unto himself a door for begging will find that God opens seventy doors of poverty unto him.”

Aktham al-Ṣayfi said, “Every act of begging, however minor, is more grievous than the receipt of any gift, however great.”

‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, may God honor him, saw a man begging at ‘Arafāt [a mountain and plain east of Mecca, where Muslim pilgrims stand before God from noon to sunset in one of their last and most prayerful rituals], so he gave him a sound beating with a whip and said, “Woe to you! How dare you beg of anyone other than God on a day such as this?”

‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās said, “The poor don’t visit a sick man, they don’t attend a funeral, nor do they come to a Friday prayer. When other people gather on their feast days and in their mosques to ask God to give them of His bounty, the poor gather to beg of people what they have in their hands.”

Al-Nu‘mān ibn al-Mundhir said, “Whoever asks for what goes beyond his right deserves to be deprived, and whoever persists in urgently demanding something deserves procrastination. Kindness is good luck and stupidity is ill fortune. The best sort of generous giving is what agrees with need, and the best pardon is one associated with power.”

Shurayḥ said, “Whoever begs for anything exposes himself to enslavement. If the one begged from gives to him, he enslaves him; and if he refuses, both of them will be humiliated: the would-be giver by the humiliation of his miserliness, and the beggar by the humiliation of being refused.”

Ḥabīb said:

The humiliation of begging is an obstructive lump in my throat
That initially chokes me and then makes it difficult for me to swallow.
If your hand gives generously or withholds miserly,
This is no compensation for my dignity that I expend.

Al-Khushanī said, “Abū Ghassān said, ‘Abū Zayd related to me the following:

A beggar in the mosque of Kufa was begging at noontime but nobody gave him anything. He said, “O God, You know my need, and You don’t need to be told. You are the One who is in no need of a gift, who is not tired of a persistent beggar, and who is not sufficiently praised by any speaker. I beg you to give me good patience, relief soon, ability to see Your guidance, and strength to do what You love and are satisfied with.” The people rushed to give to him but he said to them, “By God, I shall not trouble you tonight with anything, for I have resorted to God with my need.” Then he left, saying:

The person who suffers indignity by begging will not be
Compensated, even if he receives a fortune by begging.
If you compare a gift and begging by weighing them,
Begging will outweigh all sorts of giving.”

Muslim ibn al-Walīd said:

Beg of people [if you like]. But I will beg of God only,
And thus preserve my honor from So-and-So and So-and-So.

ʿAbīd ibn al-ʾAbras said:

Whoever begs of people will be denied a gift,
But he who begs of God is not disappointed.

Ibn Abī Ḥāzim said:

Spending a day and two nights,
And wearing two tattered robes
Are indeed easier than a people's gift for which
I have to lower my eyes [out of humiliation].
Although I have dependents
And I am poor with many debts,
I do praise God because
My needs are between Him and me.

On this theme we said:

Begging of people is a ready key
For poverty's door, so mitigate your begging.

Ashʿab al-Ṭammāʿ related on the authority of ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar that he heard the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, say, “On Resurrection Day, God, may He be exalted, will gather certain people whose faces are bare because their dignity was effaced by constant begging.”

Begging of a beggar

Abū al-Shamaqmaq praised Marwān ibn Abī Ḥafṣa, and the latter said to him, “O Abū al-Shamaqmaq, you are a poet and I am a poet. The aim of both of us is begging.”

A bedouin Arab spoke of a certain man known for begging and said, “He begs more than a man with two crutches.”

Ḥabīb [Abū Tammām] said:

The Compassionate God has not created a more stupid man
Than a beggar seeking wealth from a beggar.

Al-Aṣmaʿī said on the authority of ʿĪsā ibn ʿUmar, the grammarian, “I had arrived from a trip when Dhū al-Rumma, the poet, entered to see me. I offered him something as a gift but he said, ‘No. You and I take, and do not give.’”

White hair

Qays ibn ʿĀṣim said, “White hair is the nose tip of death.”

Another man said, “White hair is the harbinger of death.”

Al-Numayrī said, “White hair is the token of old age.”

Al-Muʿtamar ibn Sulaymān said, “Whiteness is the death of hair, and the death of hair is an occasion for the death of human beings.”

A bedouin Arab said, “I used to refuse to acknowledge a white hair and have come to refuse to acknowledge a black one. What a good thing was exchanged for a bad substitute!”

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, was told, “White hair has come too soon to you, O Apostle of God.” He replied, “It was [the Qur’anic sura of] Hūd and its sisters that gave me white hair.”

ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān was told, “White hair has come too soon to you, O Commander of the Faithful.” He replied, “What gave me white hair was speaking from the pulpits and fearing grammatical errors.”

A poet was told, “White hair has come too soon to you.” He replied, “Why would it not come too soon when I squeeze my heart to produce a piece of work for whose reward one is not hopeful, and from whose punishment one is not safe?”

Ḥabīb al-Ṭāʾī [Abū Tammām] said:

White hair has made its way to my temples,
And death’s way to my soul is now clear.
Visitors are shunned, companions are passionately grieved,
Confidants are hated, and new things are patched together.
[White hair] appears snow white to the eye,
But to the heart it is pitch black.

Maḥmūd al-Warrāq said:

I weep because of the closeness of the appointed time,
And the long distance from lapsed hope;
[I weep] because of white hair that has come
On the heels of youth that has gone—
Youth, as though it has never been there,
And white hair, as though it has always been there.
The herald of survival has passed you by,
And the herald of the appointed time has come.

He also said:

Don’t seek a trace of something utterly ruined:
White hair is one of two deaths.
It shows the ugly qualities of every disgrace,
And erases the beautiful qualities of every comeliness.
When beautiful women see you,

They see a crow of [lovers'] separation in you.
 They may have competed for you
 And were easy to obtain
 When youth was your crown
 And your cheeks were smooth.
 But when white hair beset you
 And you came to wear two turbans,
 One pitch black and another white like silver,
 Their love relation with you was mixed
 With rejection, and so they were lukewarm.
 As long as black hair lasted, they patiently bore
 To practice feigning and lying.
 But when white hair spread
 And went beyond your two temples,
 They turned their backs maliciously,
 Having enjoyed with you the two pleasures [food and sex].
 Therefore, be modest and console yourself
 Or else call the two stars of Ursa Minor!
 If misadventures afflict you
 With all sorts of odious and shameful events,
 You are [at least] safe from ever being
 A victim of an onlooker's envious eye.

Ḥabīb al-Ṭāʾī [Abū Tammām] said:

She looked at me with the eyes of an unfair person
 After her love had taken hold of my mortal organs.
 When she saw white hair on my head,
 She turned away like someone avoiding me with sufferance.
 I continued to seek her affection with kindness,
 But my hair suggested to her, "Don't do it."

Another poet said:

Umāma turned away from me when I came to visit her,
 The tears in her eyes drowning her pupils.
 She was alarmed to see white hair on my head,
 So I said to her, "Likewise, green leaves turn yellow."

Muḥammad ibn Umayya said:

The beautiful women saw me with white hair on my [bearded] cheeks,
 So they turned away from me with their glowing cheeks.
 When they used to see me or hear of me [coming],
 They blocked the loopholes with their eyes.

Al-ʿAlawī said:

Nawār reproached me for the white hair of my head.
 Daughter of my uncle: white hair is not a shame.

Shame is fleeing from the [enemy's] marching army
When it is said, "Where, where can one flee?"

Some of what we said about white hair:

White hair appeared on my [bearded] cheeks.
Is there night without day?
I bought the blackness of the former with the whiteness of the latter,
And I bartered a [man's] turban for a woman's veil.
Mature thought gave me a new robe to wear
And it stripped me of the lent one.
I did not sell love on a condition,
Nor did I make an exception in it for choice.

We also said:

They said, "Your youth is gone." I said to them:
"Is there anything new as the ever-new two things [day and night] pass?"
Be united with the one you love, despite an occasional reproach;
For the best life is a union between two intimate persons.
And cut off the ropes of a companion with whom you are not in harmony,
For the world may be too small for two persons.

And we said:

White hair has been unfair to my head and has altered it
When it saw that our rulers have been unfair.
It is as though night has descended on the parted hair
But the unveiling of bright morning has delayed it.

We also said:

The blackness of a man's hair is depleted by passing nights,
Although these latter themselves end up in depletion too.
Thus, a man's black hair turns into whiteness,
And his whiteness ends up being black.

And we said:

The abandoned traces of the homes of your youthful fun are empty,
Nothing remains of their good old times but their fireplaces.
Look, your parted hair shows evidence
Of your evanescence [*fanāʾ*], and the world confirms it;
White hair is a bill of exchange addressed to you
And death has nothing left but to exact payment.

And we also said:

In the parted hair, there are stars that don't set
And don't orbit in a celestial sphere;

The blackness of the hair is like darkness
 That has been raided by white hair.
 Like nail heads of armor, white hair is a true warning
 To us, if only nail heads could admonish us.
 Death has sent it to us as a warning
 But we disbelieved what this warning brought us,
 And we told ourselves, "Perhaps our lifetime
 Will be prolonged," [but we know] the longest is short.
 When promises [of long life] prove to be wrong and treacherous,
 The first one of them is a delusion, and so is the last one.
 Oblivion almost killed my eagerness [for long life],
 But an adult is rarely weaned [of eagerness].
 It is as if I have never delighted in [women like] suns and moons
 In my crowns, or rather they have never appealed to me;
 And as if I have never experienced desires in the shade
 Of amusement with moons whose clouds were veils.

Another poet said:

White hair is a spoiler of the pleasures of youth.
 Therefore, realize your desires when you are young.

Ibn ʿAbbās said, "Life is good health and youth."

Someone said:

Every day, I see a white hair that has grown,
 As if it has grown in the pupil of my eye.
 If I cut you with scissors out of my sight,
 I do not cut you out of my mind and my worry.

Ibn al-Muʿtazz said:

White hair has come but I did not become miserable with it;
 And youth has gone, so why should I weep for it?

He also said:

What do you want from my foolishness when the years
 Of my youth have gone and white hair has spread [on my head]?
 I lift a white hair in order to pluck it
 But the white hair plucks the black one.
 White hair will doubtless exhaust me and I'll leave it alone.
 How often have I used the scissors and the comb!

Youth and health

Abū ʿAmr ibn al-ʿAlāʾ said, "Arabs have not wept for anything as much as they have wept for youth and for not having achieved during it what it deserved."

Al-Aṣmaʿī said, "The best genres of poetry are elegies and weeping for youth."

Kuthayyir ʿAzza was asked, "Why don't you compose poetry [any more]?" He replied, "Youth is gone and I am not thrilled [by anything any longer], and ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz has died and I have no desire [to praise anyone any longer]."

ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās said, "Worldly existence is [worthy if associated with] well-being, and youth is [worthy if associated with] good health."

Maḥmūd al-Warrāq said:

Is it not strange that, when a man
Loses some of his possessions,
Someone will weep for him in sympathy
And another will hurry to console him,
Whereas when white hair robs him of the prime of youth
No one will do anything to comfort him?

Ibn Abi Ḥāzim said:

Youth has gone, so let tears flow freely;
For losing one's youth is connected with losing one's soul.
Don't believe lies: the whole of worldly existence
Is not a substitute for only one day of youth.

Jarīr said:

Youth has gone and its days have been praiseworthy,
If only they could be bought or restored!

Ṣarīʿ al-Ghawānī (the Belles' Fallen Victim) [Muslim ibn al-Walīd] said:

Ah for youth and its [pleasant] time,
If only it could abide a little longer!
Ask the life of a period whose days have gone by:
Can it ever find its way to recurrence?

[Abū Nuwās] al-Ḥasan ibn Hānīʿ said:

I can see myself, at that time, obedient to foolishness,
Being commanded by [the whims of] youth,
A comrade of frivolous play with a trailing tail to my cape
And a long lock of hair hanging from my head,
In the prime of my life, enjoying its new robe
Not yet patched by women's dyes,
Before white hair had spread on my cheeks
And my turban of black hair had become worn out.

A bedouin Arab said:

Ah for the days of youth and its times!
Its freshness cannot be borrowed, and no one can loan it.

How short its night and daytime were,
For days of joy are indeed short!

Some of what we said on youth is the following:

Youth has gone and you used to live [happily] in its shade.
Look now at yourself and in what shade you live!
White hair now forbids what youth [commanded]—
If only it can give its argument to someone who understands.

We also said:

They said, 'The days of your youth are gone,
Having been lived.' I said, 'And so are all my days gone.'
God! What a blessing youth was!
I wish it had been long lasting.
White hair has revealed its masked face
And censors have woken up after long blame.
It is as if that [youthful] living was the shadow of a passing cloud
And as if fun was a fantasy of sleep.

We also said:

Had I wished, I would have bet on ardent love and passion,
And would have gone far in enjoying pleasures;
And I would have let the robe of youth hang down,
When youth on me was like a garment embroidered on both sides.

Another poet said:

The prime of youth and black hair
Are madness – as long as there's no disobedience.

Another said:

She said, "I know you to be a madman." I replied,
"Youth is madness, the healing of which is old age."

Some of what we said about youth is the following:

I was an intimate companion of youth, then it bade me farewell
Like someone who parts but does not go away.
My days of amusement were like the shadow of a tamarisk
When my youth was like a primordial, untouched garden.

And we also said the following about it:

O my youth, how did you come to an end?
And how were you given whiteness in place of blackness?
Vicissitudes have only left of you

What the last three days of a month have left of the moon.
 Being separated from you has acquainted my heart with sorrows
 And it has separated my eyelids from sleep.
 Oh, what a blessed life has gone!
 And oh, what a searing sorrow has been acquired [instead]!
 Because of it, it is as if I had not lived happily in a home
 And had not freely wandered in the sweetest of pastures.
 May abundant rain give that ground water to drink
 And may morning clouds generously sprinkle its plants.
 How often have I concealed in it my burning thirst,
 And how often have I disclosed my lament!
 It was a time when good sense was misguided error,
 And misguided error was considered good sense;
 [It was a time] that kissed me on the mouth with coquetry,
 And made me happy with a reunion with Suʿād;
 I walked along with it, and it obediently let me lead it,
 And it walked along with me, and I obediently let it lead me.

Dyeing one's hair

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, "Change this white hair and spare it blackness."

Abū Bakr used to dye his hair with henna and *katam* solution.

Mālik ibn Asmāʾ ibn Khārīja said to his maid-servant, "Get up. Dye my hair and my beard." She said, "Leave me alone. I am tired of having so often patched you up." Mālik ibn Asmāʾ then said:

You reproach me for old age whose newness I have worn out:
 Have you seen anything new that has not turned old?

Having dyed his hair, Abū al-Aswad al-Duʿalī entered into the presence of Muʿāwiya and the latter said to him, "O Abū al-Aswad, you've become handsome. I think you should wear an amulet [as children do, for protection from the evil eye]!" Abū al-Aswad said:

The ever-new passing of day and night, their coming and going,
 Have ruined my youth, whose joy I have forever lost.
 With their unceasing frequency, they have left me nothing
 To be feared from the burning of [evil] eyes.

It was related that al-Aṣmaʿī said, "I heard about the eloquence of a certain Arab, so I went to him and found him dyeing his hair. He said, 'Son of my brother, what made you come to me?' I said, 'To seek enjoyment of your company and to listen to your conversation.' He said, 'Son of my brother, you've come to me while I am dyeing my hair, and dyeing one's hair is one of the preludes to one's weakness [in old age]. Yet I have often frightened wild beasts, led armies,

quenched the thirst of the sword [for blood], treated guests hospitably, protected the neighbor, proudly refused shame, drunk wine, sat with beautiful women, been hostile to chieftains, and overcome enemies. Today, son of my brother, old age and weak sight have left me grief after felicity.' Then he recited the following verses:

It is white hair we justify so that we may be pleased with it,
 It looks like a folded robe wrapped up to conceal tatters.
 I was like a fresh branch giving joy to the heart,
 But I have become a stick with no moisture and no leaves.
 Be patient with Time, it has vicissitudes
 And people in it move between limpidity and turbidity."

Mu'āwiya went to visit Ibn Ja'far who had been sick and found him to have regained his health. With him was a slave-girl who had a lute in her lap, so he asked, "What is this, O Ibn Ja'far?" "She is a slave-girl," Ibn Ja'far replied, "whom I teach to recite good poetry, and she increases its beauty by her beautiful singing." "Then let her sing," Mu'āwiya, who had had his hair dyed, said. So the slave-girl played her lute and sang the following verses:

Don't you have any thanks for the woman who turned
 Your white, wing-tip feathers into dark red
 And renewed whatever in you had been made old and worn out
 By the unpredictable turn of Time, its vicissitudes, and its antiquity?

Mu'āwiya tapped his foot to the music, so Ibn Ja'far asked him, "Why are you tapping your foot, Commander of the Faithful?" Mu'āwiya replied, "Every noble-hearted man is prone to be thrilled by music."

Maḥmūd al-Warrāq said the following verses on dyeing one's hair:

A guest has to be treated hospitably and his right has to be recognized.
 White hair is your guest, so treat it hospitably by dyeing it.
 It arrives with most untruthful evidence, and perhaps
 Old age arrives with mendacious evidence too.
 So invalidate its evidence against you by dyeing it,
 And thus you will negate the suspicion of anyone who suspects.
 When the time of old age comes, let it come accompanied
 By white hair and let it be free to do what it likes with it.

Another poet said:

When a woman saw me plucking out the white hair
 That looked like nails of armor from my cheeks, she said,
 "Use a dyeing plant solution, haply you will attract
 Beautiful women with white-complexioned bosoms."
 I said to her, "White hair is the harbinger of my age
 And I am not one to discredit a harbinger."

Another poet said:

White hair is made good by a dye
Is indeed suffering attendant upon suffering.
I swear by youth that had it not been for the love of white
Women and the fear of the disgust of full-breasted maidens,
I would have given rest to my cheeks from the dirt of the dye plant
And I would have declared the passing of youth.

Another said:

She came early to tell me how beautiful my hair dyed black was,
As though that would restore my youth to me.
When the skin of one's face is worn out by [the ruination of] old age,
There is no benefit for one in the use of a beautiful dye.
I wonder, what good will the blackness of my hair do you
When, on the contrary, what will please you is under my clothes?
White hair and the dye to me are to be described
Like nothing but a sun covered by clouds:
It is concealed for a while then the east wind scatters them,
And what it was veiled with ends up being gone.

On this theme we said:

Did he resolve to commit sin or did he repent
When the white hair of his head had jaded his youth?
Whenever the hair dye faded, he wept for it;
And he laughed whenever the hair dye was returned.
It was as if a white dove continued
To fight a raven at the parting [of his hair].

Virtues of white hair

The Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, "Whoever has a single hair that turns white after he adopts Islam shall have it as a light unto him on the Day of Resurrection."

Ibn Abī Shayba said, "God's Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace, forbade plucking out white hair and said, 'It is the light of a believer.'"

It was said, "The first man who saw white hair was Abraham, the Friend of the Compassionate [God], and he asked, 'Lord, what is this?' And the Lord said to him, 'This is dignity.' He said, 'Lord, increase my dignity.'"

Abū Nuwās said:

They say there is dignity in white hair for those who have it,
But my white hair, praise be to God, is not dignity.

Another poet said:

They say, "Can there be playfulness after [the age of] thirty?"
 And I say, "And can there be playfulness before thirty?"
 White hair's value is greater than having a person deprived
 Of amusement whenever a single white hair appears.

Abū Dulaf and al-Ma'mūn

Abū Dulaf entered the presence of al-Ma'mūn when the latter had a slave girl with him. Abū Dulaf had abandoned dyeing his hair, so al-Ma'mūn winked at the slave girl and she said, "Your hair has grown white, Abū Dulaf. We are God's and to Him we return. Don't worry!" Abū Dulaf kept silent, so al-Ma'mūn said to him, "Answer her, Abū Dulaf." Abū Dulaf bowed his head for a while, then raised it and said:

She sneered when she saw my white hair, so I said to her,
 "Don't sneer, for whoever lives long will have white hair.
 Men's white hair is an embellishment and a noble quality to them,
 But white hair to you, women, is a woe; so be melancholy.
 Even if white hair appears, we men still are a desire for you;
 But you, women, have nothing to be desired after you have white hair."

Maḥmūd al-Warrāq said:

A man found fault with my white hair
 That had appeared scarce when its time had come.
 So I said to him who had found fault with my white hair:
 "O you who find fault with white hair, may you not reach it."

Abū 'Abd Allāh al-Iskandarānī, the teacher of the brothers, recited the following verses to me:

What added to my long-lasting distress
 Was the appearance of two white hairs that came to me.
 With regard to one of them, I quickly hastened
 To the scissors out of love for youthful pleasures.
 As for the other, I pardoned it so that
 It might bear witness to my innocence of dyeing.

Muḥammad ibn Munādhir said:

No greeting of peace to youth, and may God
 Not greet youth with a familiar greeting!
 I have worn new garments of all kinds
 And have found youth to be the worst new thing.
 It is a companion who continues to call one to sin;
 And he who calls for a blessing on it is not well guided.
 White hair is a good motive to repent and be restrained—
 What an excellent benefit to someone who seeks benefit!

Old age

A bedouin Arab who had reached a ripe old age was asked, "How are you today?" He replied, "I've come to be fettered by a hair and to stumble over a blob of animal dung. Time has straightened my arrogantly inclined cheek after I had straightened its."

Another said, "I used to refuse to acknowledge a white hair and have come to refuse to acknowledge a black one. What a good thing was exchanged for a bad substitute!"

Mu'āwiya and al-Mustawghir

Three hundred years old, al-Mustawghir ibn Rabī'a entered the presence of Mu'āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān. The latter asked him, "How do you feel, O Mustawghir?" "Commander of the Faithful," he replied, "I feel that what I used to like to be hard in me has become tender, and what I used to like to be tender in me has become hard; [I feel that] what I used to like to be black in me has become white, and what I used to like to be white in me has become black." Then he recited the following verses:

Ask me and I will tell you the signs of old age:
Sleeping in the evening and coughing at dawn;
Sleeping little when night turns dark
And eating little when food is served;
Vision that skims and eyes that squint,
And giving up a belle at the prime of her purity.
People become decrepit, just as trees do.

A bedouin Arab said:

I complain to you of pain in my knee
And of a sluggish walk I didn't have before,
Like that of a young ostrich behind its mother.

Another said:

An old man has four weak points:
The knees, the sciatic nerve, and the jugular.

Jarīr said:

Shaking bones become tender from old age,
And there is no treatment for knee disease.

A bedouin Arab said of an old woman:

O first-born of Eve's children
And oldest person in the world,
Your age extends to Resurrection Day.

Tell us then the story of Ād,
The beginnings of Pharaoh of the pyramids,
And how the flood swept great mountains.

Another said:

When a man lives seventy years,
Happiness and youth are surely gone!

In the tribe of Ghatafān, there was Naṣr ibn Duhmān who was its leader and chieftain until he became a dotard. He lived one hundred and ninety years, until his hair became black, his teeth grew, and he became young again. No miracle similar to this was known among the Arabs.

Muḥammad ibn Munādhir said the following verses about a long-lived man:

Muʿadh ibn Muslim is a man
Of whose long life eternity complained.
Time's head turned white and Fate grew old,
But the garments of his age have remained new.
Luqmān's eagle, how long will you live?
O Lubad, how much longer will you drag life's trail?
Adam's house has become a ruin
Yet in it you are like a sustaining peg
And you ask its ravens when they limp,
"What is a headache and what is trachoma?"

ʿAbd al-Malik and al-Shaʿbī

Al-Shaʿbī went to visit ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Marwān and found him bent and worried. "What is the matter with the Commander of the Faithful?" he asked. "O Shaʿbī," ʿAbd al-Malik said, "I've just remembered Zuhayr's verses:

Having lived beyond seventy years, I feel as if
I have taken off from myself my bridle's strap.
The ravages of Time have hit me from unseen places.
What do you think of one who is hit and does not hit back?
If I had been hit by arrows that I could see, [I would understand];
I am being hit – but by no arrows.
I support myself on my hands at times, and on my stick.
I sink down thrice before I can stand up."

Al-Shaʿbī said to him, "Not so, Commander of the Faithful, but rather as Labīd ibn Rabiʿa said on having reached seventy years of age:

Having lived beyond seventy years, I feel as if
I have taken my cloak off my shoulders.

"When he came to be seventy-seven years old, he said:

On the verge of tears, my soul continued to complain to me.
 I have tolerated you seven years beyond seventy,
 So if you grow three years more, you will reach a hope;
 For in three years, you will complete eighty.

“When he became one hundred years old, he said:

I have become bored with life and its length,
 And with people asking, ‘How is Labīd?’

“When he became one hundred and ten years old, he said:

Is there not in one hundred years that a man lived
 And ten full years after them a [sufficient] lifetime?

“When he became one hundred and thirty years old and was dying, he said:

My two daughters wish that their father would live;
 But am I not only a man from Rabīʿa or Muḍar?
 Rise, therefore, and say what you both know
 And don’t scratch your faces [lamenting] and don’t shave your hair.
 Say, ‘He was a man who did not lose a friend,
 Nor did he betray or deceive a companion.’
 [Mourn] for a year, then peace be to you both;
 For whoever mourns for a full year has offered [sufficient] excuse.”

Al-Shaʿbī reported, “I saw joy beaming in ‘Abd al-Malik’s face with eagerness to live as many years.”

Labīd said also:

If my death is late to come, is there for me anything but
 Resorting to a walking stick and clutching it with my fingers,
 And telling stories about centuries gone by,
 And crawling as if I were kneeling whenever I would rise,
 And becoming like a sword whose sheath was worn out by the long time
 Since the swordsmith had made it, while its blade was indeed still sharp?

It is said that in the Book of Psalms, it is written, “Whoever reaches seventy will complain without being ill.”

Muḥammad ibn Ḥassān al-Nabaṭī said, “Don’t ask your self to give you this year what it gave you last year.”

When Muʿāwiya became old, he said, “There is nothing that I used to take pleasure in when I was young and continue to find delightful today except milk and good conversation.”

Dirār ibn ʿUmar lived long enough to have thirteen male children, so he said, “Whoever is pleased with his sons is displeased with himself.”

Ibn Abi Fanan said:

Whoever lives long will have his newness ruined by Time
 And will be betrayed by his two trusted friends: hearing and vision.
 She said, "I knew you to be insane." I said to her,
 "Indeed, youth is insanity and its healing is old age."

Abū 'Ubayda said, "An old man was asked, 'What has remained of you?' He replied, 'I am outstripped by the one who is in front of me, and am overtaken by the one who is behind me; I remember old things and forget new ones; I doze when I am among people, and stay awake when I am alone; when I stand up, the ground becomes close to me, and when I sit down it goes far from me.'"

Ḥumayd ibn Thawr al-Hilālī said:

My sight has become unreliable after having been healthy—
 Sufficient disease for you is to have been healthy and safe!

Another said:

I used not to yield to any detractor,
 But the many mornings and evenings made me yield.
 I fervently prayed to my Lord for safety so that
 He would give me health, and lo safety is a disease.

Abū al-ʿAtāhiya said (it is also reported that al-Qutāmī said it):

... A man's perfection hastens his imperfection.

The wise have said, "There is nothing that increases that does not decrease, and there is no man risen [to power] who does not go away."

A modern poet said:

Don't you see that Time has bent me,
 Altered my whole mind, and thinned me down?
 It decreased me, limb after limb, and left nothing correct
 But my name only – and my tongue.
 If names were liable to be beset by ruination,
 My name would have been ruined because of my prolonged time.
 And why would I not be ruined at the age of seventy,
 Followed by seven years that two years had preceded?
 When some idea occurs to me, something like fog
 Or like smoke appears in my imagination.

Al-Ghazzāl said:

By God, I have become envied in a short
 And not in an extended period of life.
 Praising God, I've come to have progeny
 Among whom I am desolate, as though alone.
 When I part from someone on any day,
 I think that that is the last time I part from him.

Another poet said:

Oh for an old man whose flesh was emaciated!
 He wore out three turbans of different colors:
 A pitch black one, a shabby striped one,
 And a pure white one after that.
 Vicissitudes shortened his steps
 And curved his straight bones, so he was bent.
 He accompanied Time with its various events
 And was shown severity and tenderness by it.
 Death comes after all this as though,
 By that, it will be concerned with somebody other than us.

Sufyān al-Thawrī said, praising his old age:

Although I have been afflicted with old age
 And despite what you see of my oldness,
 I know the notch of my arrow in the bow
 Before the arrow leaves me.

One who associates with unequal others because of his qualities

Ḥāritha ibn Badr al-Ghudānī was the [best] horseman of the tribe of Tamīm. He was a refined and charming poet, was given to drinking, and associated himself with Ziyād. “You associate yourself with this man,” Ziyād was told, “while he is not of your kind, and he is addicted to drinking.” “Why should I not associate myself with him?” Ziyād answered, “For whenever I ask him about anything, I find him knowledgeable about it; he never walks in front of me and obliges me to call him; he never walks behind me and obliges me to turn backward to him; and he rides on his horse with me on mine but his knee never touches mine.” When Ziyād died, Ḥāritha ibn Badr said the following verses about him:

O Abū al-Mughīra, the world is deceptive;
 And he whom it deceives is deluded.
 You had knowledge of that which was good
 And you disavowed that which was reprehensible.
 If Islam and honor ever immortalize an old man,
 Islam and honor will surely immortalize you.

The remainder of these verses will be found in the “book” we singled out for elegies.

Ziyād did not jest or laugh with anyone in his company. Once, the tribe of Rāsib [“sinking”] and the tribe of Ṭufāwa [“floating”] disputed about a boy, each of them affirming he belonged to them. Ziyād was at a loss as to a decision. “May God honor the prince,” Ḥāritha ibn Badr said to him, “I have an opinion about this boy. If the prince allows me I’ll give my opinion about him.” “What

is your opinion about him?” Ziyād asked. Ḥāritha said, “My opinion is that he be thrown into the Tigris. If he sinks, he belongs to the tribe of Rāsib; and if he floats, he belongs to the tribe of Ṭufāwa!” Ziyād smiled, took his shoes, and entered [his private room]. He then came out and asked Ḥāritha, “What made you jest in my company?” “A good joke that occurred to me, may God make the prince prosper,” replied Ḥāritha. “Don’t do that again,” Ziyād declared.

Ibn Ziyād, Ḥāritha, and Abū al-Aswad

When ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād assumed rule after his father’s death, he dropped Ḥāritha and shunned him. “Why don’t you treat me as your father did?” asked Ḥāritha. “Do you claim you are better or wiser than he was?” ‘Ubayd Allāh replied, “My father was so refined that the company of someone like you did not harm him, whereas I am a young man and I am afraid you’ll burn me with your fire. If you wish [to be in my company], abandon drinking and you’ll be the first to enter and the last to leave.” “By God,” Ḥāritha asserted, “I’ve not abandoned drinking for God’s sake, how can I abandon it for yours?” Ziyād said, “Then choose a town and I’ll appoint you as its governor.” Ḥāritha chose Surraq in the land of Iraq, and ‘Ubayd Allāh appointed him as its governor. Abū al-Aswad al-Du‘alī, who was his friend, wrote to him:

O Ḥārith ibn Badr, you’ve been given a governorship,
So be in it a rat who will betray and steal,
And boast of wealth to Tamim – wealth has
A tongue with which a timorous man can speak.
People are of two kinds only: either credulous ones
Who say what they like or incredulous ones
Who say things without being thoroughly proficient,
And when they’re told to verify, they don’t.
Forget what they say and don’t pay attention to them,
For your lot in the wealth of Iraq is Surraq.

At the end of his letter, he signed off, “May good sense be with you!”

Ibn al-Walid al-Bajalī and Ibn Bayḍ

Ibn al-Walid al-Bajalī, who was the nephew of Khālid ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Qasrī, became ruler of Isfahan, and he was a devout and righteous man. Ḥamza ibn Bayḍ ibn ‘Awf came to see him wishing to be one of his company. Ibn al-Walid was told, “Someone like Ḥamza does not suit the company of someone like you, for he is interested in dogs and amusement.” So Ibn al-Walid sent him three thousand dirhams and ordered him to leave. Ḥamza wrote the following about him:

O Ibn al-Walid whose generosity is hoped for,
And who gives relief [to people] in unfortunate events,
The way of your favor to me is on my mind;

Why doesn't my mind agree with your mind?
 Within my shirt is a creative poet
 And within yours generosity abides.
 People blame you for befriending me—
 But musk may be a companion of charcoal.
 If you befriend no one but a man
 Like you, you'll never find the likes of you.
 Consider me a man coming to seek [religious] guidance:
 Bestow therefore your Islam generously upon my ignorance.

Ibn al-Walid said to him, "You are right!" And he made him a close friend and Ḥamza was in good standing with him.

Prince ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ḥakam had reproved his boon-companions and ordered the young man Naṣr to drop them out of the list of stipends in the treasury account books and not to replace them. After a few days, he missed them and said to Naṣr, "We miss those friends of ours." Naṣr said to him, "They have sufficiently suffered from the prince's anger to learn a lesson. If he thinks he should send for them, I will send for them." "Send for them," ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ordered. When they came, the melancholy of [the prince's] anger was still with them. They sat down, but they were not joyful and did not go into subjects they had gone into before. The prince asked Naṣr, "What prevents these people from relaxing and being joyful?" "They still have the speechless melancholy of the anger they suffered," Naṣr replied. "Tell them, we have forgiven them," the prince said, "and so let them relax and be joyful." The poet and astronomer ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Shamr stood up and knelt in front of the prince, then recited a poem of his in which he spoke ill of one of his friends, but he ended it with two beautiful verses, saying:

O God's mercy upon His creatures, whose generosity is ever pouring:
 If you loathe sinners' company, few would be the people you'll associate with.

The most beautiful of what has been said on this theme is what al-Nābigha said:

You'll never keep a friend whom you don't accept
 With his imperfections. What man is perfectly refined?

Their speech about the Qurʾān

Al-Marīsī wrote to Abū Yaḥyā Maṣṣūr ibn Muḥammad, "Write to me: Is the Qurʾān creator or created?" So al-Marīsī wrote back, "May God save us and you from every sedition, and may He make us and you members of the orthodox community [*Ahl al-Sunna*] and of those who do not desire to be away from the congregation [*al-ḡamāʿa*]. If you do, what a great grace it is; and if you do not, it is perdition. We say: Speaking about the Qurʾān is a heresy, in which the one who answers takes upon himself that which is not his responsibility, and the

one who asks takes upon himself that which is not his [to ask about]. We know no creator but God, and anything other than God is created. The Qurʾān is the speech of God. Bring yourself to its names that God has named it by, and you will be one of those guided; and do not name the Qurʾān by a name of your making so you will be one of those gone astray. May God make us and you among those who fear their Lord in the invisible world, and those who are apprehensive of the Hour [of Judgment].”

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